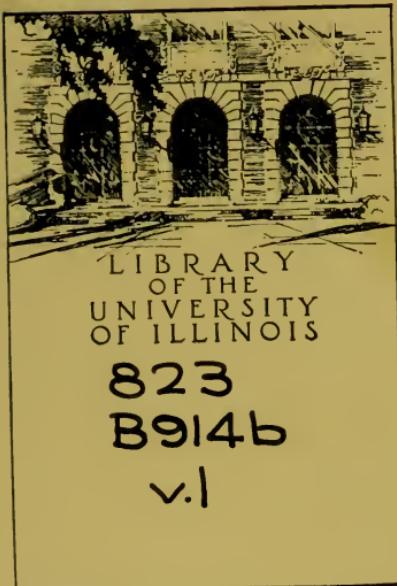


BEATING
THE AIR.



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BEATING THE AIR.

— admit me of thy crew,
To live with her and live with thee
In unreproved pleasures free.

MILTON.

BEATING THE AIR.

BY

ULICK RALPH BURKE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BEATING THE AIR.

CHAPTER I.

CHARLES PERCEVAL was one of those easy-going products of modern civilization with which England, and especially London, abounds. Indeed, such a man is an essentially English product. The second son of a baronet of large landed property, he had inherited a thousand a year from his mother, which was quite enough to prevent his ever doing anything at the Bar, a profession which he had embraced in early life, chiefly because it compelled him to do nothing, and enabled him to do anything, advantages

which the Bar undoubtedly possesses to an eminent degree. After carrying out the first part of this professional programme with great completeness for some years, he grew tired of a too strict adherence to the more striking side of his profession, and having arrived at the age of thirty-five, he turned his professional attention to what may be called its alternative advantages, and married.

His wife was a young lady of good family and indifferent fortune, and Charles Perceval, finding his income augmented by his marriage to the extent of about two hundred a-year, while his expenditure consequent upon the same step was, or would be, increased by at least five times that amount, determined to avail himself still further of the alternative advantages of his profession. His father, Sir Humphrey, who had had three pocket boroughs of his own before the Reform Bill of 1832, had just given up his seat for Midshire, and his eldest son Walter

had been returned, without a contest, for the paternal, not to say ancestral, seat. Such a supporter was valuable to any government, and although young Walter pished and pshawed a good deal before he came to the point, having the natural repugnance of those who have everything they want themselves to ask a favour for others, he was a good-hearted fellow at bottom ; he spoke to the Minister, and in due time the world was informed of the fact that Charles Perceval, Esq., Barrister-at-Law, had been appointed a Commissioner of the Inland Harbour Commission ; and the younger brother wrote to the elder, and thanked him for an addition to his income of eight hundred a-year. In due time a son was born to Charles and Alice, for that was Mrs. Perceval's name, and he was christened Humphrey after his grandfather.

Charles was very fond of his wife, and she was equally attached to him, and they

both made themselves perfectly happy in London society. Neither of them cared much for the country ; and beyond occasional visits to Shipton Court, where old Sir Humphrey was always ready to welcome them, they rarely left town, except to take a run over the Continent in August and September ; when the Inland Harbour Commission got through its work without the aid of its Commissioners, and neither the Commission nor the country found itself one whit the worse for it.

Sir Humphrey Perceval's eldest son was a bolder and more adventurous spirit than his younger brother. After a dashing career at Eton, and a very brief sojourn at Christ Church, he had gone out to India to join a crack cavalry regiment, with the view of seeing the world and shooting tigers, but being disappointed in both respects, he had exchanged into a regiment stationed in England ; and finally, seeing no chance of

war, and impatient of even the mild restraint of regimental life, he had sold his commission and travelled in search of “big game,” and other excitements unattainable at home, over North and South America, Africa, and Australia. Such travels were less common half-a-century ago than they are now, and when young Walter definitely returned to England at seven-and-thirty, his unusual experience of the world made him a lion, and his knowledge almost an authority. For like many young Englishmen he was by no means “such a fool as he looked,” and though his travelling companions might have thought him chiefly interested in tigers and crocodiles, in high mountains and broad rivers, in rifles and tobacco, he had remarked a great many other things in the course of his travels, and had thought about them, in his own way, too.

Sir Humphrey, who was then getting into years, was most anxious that his eldest son

should stay at home. Young Walter, who, without being quite aware of it, was tired of his distant wanderings, informed his father that he would travel no more, at least, for the present—and derived great satisfaction from the contemplation of himself in the character of a self-denying and dutiful son.

The old baronet was delighted, and his heir returned to the milder excitements of English shooting and hunting, with much the same pleasure that exhausted speculators in doubtful mines or foreign loans are said to revert to the “sweet simplicity of the three-per-cent.”

With greater difficulty Sir Humphrey induced his son to go into Parliament, although he told him that he need never attend the House, except just to put in an appearance about the time of the Derby, Ascot, or any of the other great festivals. But when he told him that he felt compelled to give up his seat from age and increasing

infirmity, and that if his son did not take his place there would probably be a contest in the county, which would possibly lead to one of the Branscombes getting into Parliament, the young man, feeling called upon to show at once his patriotism and his filial piety, consented ; and the baronet having accepted the onerous post of the Stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds, Walter Perceval, Esq., represented Midshire in his stead.

A few years after his retirement, Sir Humphrey died, and having been duly buried in the family vault, was duly mourned for, and forgotten. His eldest son inherited all his property, real and personal, and after having made a few of those alterations in the house and grounds that every eldest son longs to make for years before he comes into possession of his ancestral acres, he settled down at Shipton Court. Two years afterwards he took the hounds, got a maiden aunt to do the honours of his house

to numerous visitors of both sexes, attended petty sessions, looked after poachers, and became a very fair specimen of a straightforward, selfish, intelligent, unintellectual, good-humoured, prejudiced English country gentleman.

Paradoxical as it may seem, such men, although the very soul of honesty, are eminently deceptive. Apparently the most good-natured creatures in the world, they are often the most selfish. Rough in dress and manners, they are in some ways much more refined than the *petits maîtres* of London or Vienna, and often as tender-hearted as a young mother ; they never read and they apparently never think, and yet they possess a vast amount of information, and have decided and frequently correct ideas upon an infinite variety of questions ; while finally, a certain “insular” shyness, which seems to set upon them the stamp of innate modesty, is really but the outward manifestation of

a deep-seated and, perhaps, not altogether inexcusable pride.

Sir Walter, indeed, duly performed all the duties of an English country gentleman except one: he did not marry. He had no fancy for ladies' society in general; still less for the society of any one lady in particular; and though in his wild youth he had been by no means immaculate, and had often followed tenderer game than elephants and rhinoceroses, yet as master of Shipton Court, he seemed insensible to the charms of either lawful or unlawful love. To the maiden aunt, indeed, he was sufficiently polite. But then he regarded her less as a lady and a companion, than as a guest-receiver and dinner-orderer, or a housekeeper with whom he could converse without that painful sense of inferiority which always oppresses a man who attempts to argue with an upper female servant.

He liked Mrs. Charles Perceval, who was

a soft unpretentious woman, as well as any one, and would urge her to come down and stay at Shipton Court more frequently than she did, and bring his little nephew with her.

In due time that young gentleman developed from a persecutor of nurses into a persecutor of governesses, and finally was translated to be himself persecuted at school. Little Humphrey had no brothers and sisters, and without being absolutely "spoiled," he was somewhat languidly brought up at home. An only son must be indulged to a greater extent than is entirely good for him, but Humphrey's parents were too much occupied with their own affairs to take any pains to injure his character or his disposition, so he grew up pretty much as he would, and the result was by no means unsatisfactory.

Rulers of children, like rulers of kingdoms, do infinitely more mischief by ill-directed energy, than by any amount of neglect.

The sons of clergymen are, as a rule, far wilder in their youth than the children of those whose duty is neither to preach nor to teach. There is a quaint proverb current in Spain, which says that “we are all as God made us, and most of us a great deal worse;” and, indeed, moral “progress” is but too often in the wrong direction. It is so easy to make people bad, and so difficult to make them good, chiefly because no one knows exactly how to set to work, and all unsuccessful efforts in the right direction tell against us, like that form of Piquet so popular in French Clubs, when at the end of the game, the winner adds to his own score all the points that the loser has made.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Perceval went abroad every year, and not wishing to be encumbered with a child or a maid, certainly the two greatest nuisances in continental travelling, used to send little Humphrey down to Shipton Court for a couple of months every

summer. He did not see much of his uncle, but the maiden aunt took good care of his material well-being, accompanied him to church on Sunday mornings, and supplemented the eloquence of the vicar by hearing him his catechism on Sunday afternoon.

As the boy grew older, he spent the greater part of his time in the old-fashioned library of the house, a library to which his uncle had scarcely added a single volume, but which was well stored with the standard and popular books of former generations. Here he devoured, before he could half understand—the works of Shakspeare, Dryden, Pope, and Byron ; and made the acquaintance of Pipes and Trulliber and Trunnion and Thwackum and Square, as well as of Lemuel Gulliver and Robinson Crusoe. Nor was he content with the careful reading of his favourite authors, as he lay flat on the old Turkey rugs with which the floor was covered—his chin in his hands and his elbows

on the ground—but he dipped into almost every book in the library, standing on one of the steps of the mahogany ladder, or perched on the topmost round, and skimming a duodecimo, like a fastidious monkey feasting at the top of some tropical fruit tree.

When he was ten years old, little Humphrey went for a year and a half to a private tutor's, to be transferred in due time to one of the larger public schools.

“What are you going to do with Humphrey?” Sir Walter had said to his brother Charles one evening at Shipton, as they sat somewhat silently over their wine.

“A most perplexing question, Walter. I had thought of the navy, but the boy does not care about going to sea. I don't want him to stay much longer at Mr. Willis's. My wife does not fancy his going abroad.”

“But why not send him to Eton,” interrupted Sir Walter; “you and I were there, you know.”

“Yes,” said his brother, smiling, “but I don’t think either of us learnt very much there.”

“Oh, learning be hanged,” said the baronet, “a boy learns enough at Eton to know how to behave like a gentleman wherever he may find himself.”

“I am afraid Humphrey will want to know something more than this,” said the younger brother ; “however valuable an Eton training may be, I am afraid I don’t keep quite within my income, and Humphrey will be a much poorer man than I am. He must do something for himself when he is grown up—unless indeed,” said his father, smiling, “you will promise to get him some commissionership or other.”

“Certainly not,” said the elder, somewhat more roughly than appeared necessary, “but I do not think he will have to work for his living, for all that.” He paused, as though he would say no more, and after

a few moments continued, “If I don’t marry, you know, he must come in for Shipton.”

Charles started. He was, of course, the heir presumptive to his brother’s title and property, and had frequently contemplated the possibility of Sir Walter dying unmarried, and of his becoming Sir Charles Perceval of Shipton, but he was by nature neither ambitious nor covetous ; he was very happy in his own mode of life, and he would much rather have had an extra thousand a year than an extra ten thousand ; and he had never dwelt upon his “great expectations.” But he now saw or rather perhaps realized, almost for the first time, how different was the position of his son with regard to the future. After a moment’s pause, therefore, he rejoined, “Quite so, and do you think that it would be as well for him to go to Eton ?”

“Oh, just as you like, my dear Charles,” said his brother, “you must do whatever

you think best. Suppose we join the ladies."

No more was said, but Charles Perceval talked over the conversation that night with his wife, and before they dropped off to sleep, they arrived at two conclusions, first, that Sir Walter would never marry, and secondly, that their son should go to Eton.

At twelve years of age, accordingly, Humphrey Perceval became an Eton boy, and in a short time gave up reading and took to cricket, and learnt to wear good clothes and make bad Latin verses. If he had had any airs on going to Eton, they would no doubt have been speedily knocked out of him, to be replaced of course by other more conventional Etonian airs; but he had none; and he soon learnt to attach importance to a fact, which up to that time had been of the most supreme indifference to him, namely, that he was virtually heir to a

baronetcy and fifteen thousand a year. But he thought much more of large scores and maiden overs, of the river and of the playing fields ; while Shipton Court as the scene of his occasional holiday visits, and his first experiences in the hunting-field at Christmas time and among the turnips in September, was much more to him than the thoughts of possessing Shipton Court as his own at some indefinite and uncertain time. The happiest Youth is that which seeks neither to penetrate nor to anticipate the future, but is content to be entirely engrossed in the pleasures and the duties of the present. Humphrey's was essentially a happy life. He had brains enough to get through the ordinary routine of school work at Eton with a minimum of trouble. He was strong and skilful enough to take pleasure in all games and field sports at school and in the holidays. He was perfectly healthy. He was tolerably

popular, and he coveted no greater popularity than he possessed among his companions. His parents had always treated him both liberally and kindly, and were getting more and more attached to him as he grew older. His uncle, too, liked him. He was by nature generous and affectionate, hot-tempered, but large-hearted, and quite intelligent enough to take an interest, as he grew older, in the society he met at his father's home in Queen Street, Mayfair, during the Easter, and part of the Christmas holidays. What that society was we have now to see.

CHAPTER II.

THE 29th of July was a hot day in London in the year 18—; and the little house in Queen Street, Mayfair, was by no means the coolest spot in the metropolis, in spite of the drawn blinds, the closed windows, and the great block of Wenham Lake ice which stood perspiring in the middle of Mrs. Charles Perceval's dining-table.

It was a gala day in Queen Street, Mayfair. First of all, it was Humphrey Perceval's sixteenth birthday; secondly, he was coming home from Eton on that very day; and thirdly, in honour of this double event his

mother had asked a number of her most agreeable acquaintances to dinner.

Mrs. Perceval had finished luncheon some time. Humphrey, like all boys of his age, had been somewhat vague as to the hour at which he would arrive; and his mother, after keeping luncheon waiting as long as her feelings for the butler would allow her, on a day when that functionary's whole mind was engrossed in the evening entertainment, had eaten a mouthful of cold lamb and salad, and retired to the drawing-room to fancy that every cab or carriage whose wheel rolled within earshot of Queen Street, Mayfair, was the cab which brought her son. What in the world is more weary than waiting and watching for wheels? Bearers of sorrow or bearers of joy, be their burden trivial or all-important, there would seem to be something peculiarly harassing to the nervous system in the continued strain upon the tympanum, and the

recurrence of unsympathizing disappointments.

Alice Perceval sat in her drawing-room that sultry afternoon, trying to make herself believe she was reading a novel, by turning over the pages which her eye, perhaps, had read, but of which her mind had taken no cognizance. She was a fresh-looking Englishwoman of some forty summers, which she bore as only an Englishwoman can, and looked in her fresh cotton gown, her simple head-dress, and her bright pleasant face, as though she might have just come "home for holidays" herself. An easy and a healthy life, unracked by passion and almost unruffled by care, and, above all, a pleasant temper and that contented mind which is not only a continual feast, but which is worth all Cornaro's recipes in the art of preserving health, had left Alice Perceval at forty fresher in body and mind than many women scarcely out of their teens.

But see, she starts up—a cab has this time really drawn up at the door—a cab well laden with luggage within and without; and a fine, fresh-looking youth is standing on the doorstep. Parkins is not long in opening the door; and in a moment Humphrey, for it is he, is upstairs in the drawing-room, and in his mother's arms. A very broad portmanteau, sundry boxes, and a very long carpet-bag, suggestive of cricket-bats and pads, are duly transferred from the cab to the house; the cabman, grumbling at the extra sixpence which Mr. Parkins considered sufficient, is driving slowly off; and the chief butler himself, harassed only by the thought that Master Humphrey may disturb his festive arrangements by calling for lunch, betakes himself once more to the pantry, and stimulates John Thomas, his liveried subordinate, to fresh exertion in the direction of polishing salvers and brightening delicate glasses. But fortunately for Mr. Parkins, and perhaps even

more fortunately for John Thomas, Master Humphrey had lunched before he left Eton. It really was dinner—dinner at one o'clock ; but it would not do to say so to a young gentleman of fully sixteen years of age ; and having no desire to hurt our hero's feelings, we will call it luncheon. He refused even the cup of tea which his mother pressed upon him ; and although an Etonian of sixteen is of course a man, and would as soon admit that he was a shoebblack as a "schoolboy," he delighted Mrs. Perceval and himself with such a flow of schoolboy talk as only an ingenuous lad on the first day of the holidays can pour into the adoring and sympathizing ears of his mother.

As the day wore on, Charles Perceval came in from his office—or from the Club,—and warm as were the greetings between him and his son, the truth of the old saying, that "Two is company and three is none," was exemplified by the slight change in the

tone of the conversation. Most boys are especially attached to their mother ; some few prefer their father's company ; but none are as completely at their ease in the presence of both parents together as in that of either separately.

“Would not you like to see your room, Humphrey darling,” said his mother at length ; “we do not dine till eight o'clock, but you might like to take off your hot clothes and wash your hands.”—“And look after your things,” added his father.

“Certainly,” said the boy answering his mother, and taking her arm led her tenderly up stairs to the little room so full of old associations, and of new proofs of a woman's forethought and of a mother's love. Charles Perceval went down to his cellar and gave out various kinds of wine to Mr. Parkins ; and father and son did not meet again till dinner-time. The drawing-room window was now open, and the cool evening

air refreshed the room and brought in delicate odours from the flowers which were cultivated with such care on the window-sills. Cultivated is not perhaps the correct expression; for the flowers were brought regularly from Covent Garden, and as the plants died down or went out of flower they were replaced by others. There is no other way of “cultivating” flowers in a London window-box. The room itself was tastefully but somewhat quaintly furnished. A conventional upholsterer and decorator would have been shocked at it. There was positively no “drawing-room suite.” There was no “white and gold:” nor was there any essentially drawing-room furniture in the shape of gilt and mother-of-pearled chairs, which no right-minded person would ever dream of sitting down upon. There was not even the pair of water-colour drawings—generally sea-pieces—with very wide white mounts and narrow beaded frames. In fact,

an upholsterer would scarcely have called it a drawing-room at all. But it was charmingly furnished notwithstanding.

The floor was covered with Indian matting, which looked and felt cool in the hot July weather. The walls were, perhaps, a little too much covered with pictures: but there were no bad ones among them, and many of them had stories, if not histories, which made them doubly interesting for their owners. The furniture had been “picked up” at home or abroad, or made according to design brought from Nuremburg or Naples or Cluny. Even the lamps reminded one of the Museo Borbonico, and the table at one end of the room was a fac-simile of that in Sallust’s house at Pompeii. And yet the room was far from looking like an old curiosity shop, or an artistic lumber-room; in the first place, the space was not overcrowded with furniture; there was room to move about in, as well as chairs and tables to

admire ; and a general refined taste, or *common* artistic perception, which bears the same relation to all other and special artistic perceptions that *common* sense does to all the other senses, led the Percevals to know how to harmonize the whole. Alphonse Karr says that of all senses the rarest is *common* sense, and the common artistic sense is at least as rare. The French, who have as a rule excellent decorative taste, and who are aware of the rarity of this art of harmoniously blending incongruous furniture, prefer to furnish and decorate each room according to one given style, be it Louis XIV., Louis XVI., or François I., and the result is eminently satisfactory. But Englishmen, who, as a general rule, have no decorative taste whatsoever, refuse to be trammelled by a style or a period—indeed they usually know nothing about such a distinction ;—and generally crowd their rooms of ceremony or of state with the worst examples

of the furniture and decorative art of the most incongruous periods, with the addition of a certain amount of independent vulgarity, purely and distinctively native.

But we must not leave Queen Street, Mayfair, where the guests are already arriving. Let us make their acquaintance as they enter Mrs. Perceval's drawing-room, as she and her husband stand ready to receive them, and where Humphrey finds himself somewhat ill at ease, but anxious to appear as if he were as much accustomed to London dinner-parties as one of Gunter's waiters. But he was a nice unaffected boy, without conceit, and with good sense enough not to try to carry off his shyness by that affectation of ease which so often leads so many youths to one of the most striking forms of impudence ; so he held his tongue at first, and made intelligent answers when he was spoken to—to the delight of his parents and the great satisfac-

tion of their guests. A hobble-de-hoy is generally "out of place," and still more "in the way" in good company.

The first arrivals were Lord and Lady Blisworth.

Lord Blisworth had been in early life in the Diplomatic Service, and as a younger son had seen a good deal of the world as a comparatively poor man. On succeeding to his brother's title and estates, he had given up the wandering life of a Diplomatic Secretary, and had married a lady of good connection and great intelligence. Without any taste for political life, and being a man rather of study than of action, Lord Blisworth took no part in the debates in the Upper House, and in the vast vortex of London society he was little known outside the circle of his own immediate friends, by whom he was equally liked and respected. At the time we speak of he was about sixty years of age, tall, and somewhat thin, with features

more pleasant than striking, and a countenance in whose gentle repose no very decided intellectual power was apparent ; and it was only when conversation lighted up the whole face that the deep blue eyes beamed with a quiet power, and led one to see that Lord Blisworth was no ordinary man. His wife was some ten years younger, a perfect specimen of an English lady in the serenity of middle age.

I do not know why the word middle-aged is so offensive to the ears of our own country-women. For it is the period at which an Englishwoman most decidedly surpasses her rivals of any other nation. At fifty, a Spaniard is fat and yellow, an Italian lean and bearded, a French woman faded, a German hard, frowzy, and carpet slippereed, an American leaden and shrivelled, but at fifty an Englishwoman, especially among the higher ranks of society, is, like Lady Blisworth, fresh in face and rounded in

figure, with a light heart and a pleasant smile.

“My son, just returned from Eton,” said Mrs. Perceval, looking towards Humphrey, who bowed, came forward, and shook hands with his mother’s guests. It is somewhat difficult to know exactly what to say first to a boy under the circumstances : and Lord Blisworth hesitated a moment, when Lady Blisworth began, with a smile, “Don’t you find your mother looking very well ? It’s really very difficult to believe that you can be her son ; only that you are so very like her.”

These few words and the kind manner which accompanied them, made Humphrey feel quite at home at once ; and he felt a little flattered, too, without quite knowing it, inasmuch as even a son’s eye could not be blind to the fact that Mrs. Perceval was a decidedly handsome woman. But before he had time to think much about it, the butler

announced Mr. and Mrs. Hozier, and a young clergyman and his wife entered the room and were immediately welcomed by their hostess, and duly introduced to her son and heir.

“How do you like Eton?” said Mr. Hozier. “It is not so very long since I was there myself. I was a Tug, you know.”

Humphrey did not know, — indeed, being an oppidan of the oppidans, and his course of education at Eton having comprised an unlimited contempt, if not actual aversion, for Tugs, he stood for a moment aghast, wondering what Mr. Hozier was like when he was a Tug, and if other Tugs would grow up like Mr. Hozier, and generally what business any Tug had to grow up and come and dine in Queen Street, Mayfair. It was only for a moment, however, and then he recovered himself and made an appropriate reply, and was much relieved by a diversion made by Mrs. Hozier, who also asked him

in an interested voice, as if it was quite an original question, “How do you like Eton?”

To which Humphrey replied, as before, “Very much, thank you ;” but added with great originality and tact, “But, of course, I like coming home, you know,” which quite satisfied Mrs. Hozier.

More guests had now assembled, and in a few minutes, they were all, to the number of fourteen, seated round Mrs. Perceval’s dining-table.

One London dinner is very like another, save that some are better than others, and Mrs. Perceval’s was one of the “better sort.” Humphrey was rather bewildered with the conversation, which seemed to him to relate exclusively to subjects of which he knew nothing whatever. No one present seemed to know or care anything about cricket, or boating, or even about hunting or shooting, but they preferred foreign policy, and even

foreign literature, and talked about art, and made allusions to European statesmen or Italian *virtuosi* of whom Humphrey had never heard ; and to crown all, Lord Blisworth told two or three French stories which convulsed everybody with laughter, but of which Humphrey did not understand one syllable. Lady Blisworth talked very pleasantly to him after dinner, and so did Mrs. Shirley, an old widow lady who lived in Curzon Street, and who gave very agreeable little dinners herself, and was altogether a kind and sympathetic neighbour. But a discussion as to the relative merits of the “Paradise Lost” and the “Divina Commedia,” which began between Mr. Hozier and a Lady Adare, who was a great admirer of Dante, becoming general, Humphrey again found himself on the outside. He had never read the “Paradise Lost” in the library at Shipton ; he had no notion as to who wrote the “Divina Commedia,” and he re-

lapsed into more congenial meditation as to how soon he was to go down to Shipton ; and whether he would have much cricket there, whether it would be too late for fishing in the river ; how that young horse which Sir Walter had said he might always ride was getting on, and generally how he would pass the time till the first of September, when he had been promised a few days' shooting, and the eighteenth of September when he would have to go back to School. Meanwhile, Mr. Hozier was maintaining how infinitely superior to anything in the Italian poem was Milton's description of Satan, who—

“ In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower ; his form had not yet lost
All its original brightness, nor appeared
Less than archangel ruined and the excess
Of glory obscured.”

And Lady Adare was comparing the pure and ethereal spirits with which Dante has peopled his Paradise with the gross and

material beings whom Milton has represented as waging earthly war in heaven.

“After all,” said Lord Blisworth, “perhaps the greatest defect of ‘Paradise Lost’ is that Satan is the hero.”

“In which,” interrupted Mr. Hozier, “the poem is only too true to nature and the world, whether before or after the Flood.”

“Good gracious!” said Mrs. Shirley, “you positively remind me of Mr. Glowry in Peacock’s novel—‘Gryll Grange,’ is it not, Mr. Lechmere?”

“I think,” said the gentleman addressed, “the character you refer to, who is always exclaiming ‘The devil is come among us having great wrath,’ is in ‘Headlong Hall.’ How clever all those little novels of Peacock’s are. No one writes anything in the shape of a novel in less than three volumes now-a-days, and yet there is more in one of Peacock’s chapters than in half-a-dozen of most modern volumes. But even as far as

the *form* is concerned we have nothing like him. His works remind one rather of the *Romans et Contes* of Voltaire and Diderot —‘Candide,’ or ‘Zadig,’ or ‘L’Homme aux Quarante Écus,’ than of anything in modern English that I can call to mind.”

“True,” said Lord Blisworth, “but there is but one Voltaire, and there can be but one ‘Candide.’ And yet I do not think any of us half know or half appreciate Voltaire. He wrote the best tragedy and the only readable epic in the French language ; he wrote the best tale and perhaps the best mock heroic poem in any language. His historical studies were marvellous, not only for their variety and comprehensiveness, and for the vast amount of research that they show, composed as they were at a time when there were no accessible works on history to be consulted, but for the philosophical mode of treating the subject itself.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Hozier, “he is undoubtedly one of the first of scientific historians; those who preceded him should rather be called chroniclers.”

“He may be scientific,” said Lady Blisworth, “but he never lets his science peep out. What very charming reading all his history is.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mr. Perceval. “His infidelity apart, I think he is not only the greatest writer that France has produced, but one of the greatest writers that the world has ever known. And as to his *infidelity* we must remember, first of all, what was the *fidelity* of the age and the country in which he wrote—when religion was represented by the *Abbé Desfontaines*, and upheld by the Regent *d'Orléans*, and when the few respectable men in France who believed in anything higher than their pockets and their bellies, were abusing one another like fishwives, and indignant only that

they were not allowed to burn one another alive. Religion meant the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the adulation of Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry, unlimited *Lettres de Cachet*, and a vague longing for another St. Bartholomew. It meant a miserable and ground-down people, an untaxed and dissolute clergy; it meant persecution, and oppression, and fraud, and debauchery, and ignorance, and shame; and it is because it meant all this that the French Revolution was what it was."

"It is but too true," said Mr. Hozier; "and Voltaire, like other people, bears the blame of a great deal for which he is in no way answerable. Very few English people, as Lord Blisworth says, know anything whatever of either the life or the works of the great French wit and philosopher, and this is all the more inexcusable, as he lived for some time in England, and was continually speaking in terms of great admiration

of our country and its institutions in his works, while the ‘Henriade’ was actually published in London, with an English dedication to an English Queen !”

“And yet,” said Lady Blisworth, “everyone thinks they have a right to talk of Voltaire, and to abuse his life, his principles, and all his writings *en masse*, as if they were intimately acquainted with the ninety or a hundred volumes in which his collected works are published.”

“They probably talk with more confidence,” said Mr. Perceval dryly, “than if they were.”

There was a slight pause.

“*Apropos* of what you were saying of the *form* of Peacock’s and Voltaire’s novels,” said Mr. Tench, a literary man by profession, with a bald head and a somewhat untidy beard, “it is a mere question of advertising.”

“Of advertising—how ?” said Mr. Perceval.

“ Why, every novel published now-a-days must be in three volumes, or it will not pay its expenses. Half-a-guinea a volume is the established price ; and nothing less than a guinea and a half will pay for the amount of advertising which is now requisite to make every novel a success. I have known a publisher refuse a novel written to appear in two volumes ; and the author had to take it back and ‘ pad it out ’ to the extent of another volume ! What should you have thought of its *form* after this operation ? ”

The conversation now turned upon advertising, its advantages and disadvantages, a subject which, like the advertisements themselves, introduced a great variety of subjects, and it was midnight before the party broke up.

CHAPTER III.

IN a sordid-looking room in Norfolk Street, Strand, two youths were sitting at a table covered with the remains of an uncomfortable breakfast. It was near eleven o'clock on a Sunday morning in the month of May, and the glorious old bells of St. Clement Danes were ringing out their stirring invitation to church, blended with the fainter accompaniment of the chimes of St. Dunstan's and the Temple on the one side, and St. Mary-le-Strand on the other, a harmonious, an inspiriting Babel of bells. At length the deep tones of Big Ben were borne down the river on the westerly

breeze, and in a moment, as if by enchantment, all was still,—still with the stillness of eastern London on a Sunday morning. The window of the room we have described was partly open, but the occupants took no note of these things, but divided their attention between some uninviting looking tea and some equally uninviting looking books. Books of a similar appearance were littered all over the room ; indeed, with the exception of the crazy furniture, some empty and half-empty bottles, and the half-eaten viands with which the table was covered, there seemed to be nothing else in the room but books and dirt. And this even to the human occupants ; for physically, they might have been said to represent *Dirt* : morally, they represented *Books*.

“Towser,” said one of the young men to the other, with a weary yawn, “I feel devilish coppery this morning.”

The speaker, whose name was Lippincot,

certainly did not look particularly fresh, but he was at least equalled in seediness of appearance by his friend Mr. Towser. That gentleman was dressed in a short and rather greasy blue coat, with somewhat loud tweed "continuations," carpet slippers on his feet, and a short pipe in his mouth. His sallow face, unbrushed and wiry black hair, and obtrusively unwashed fingers, seemed merely characteristic of the room ; but he had a look of intellectual power in the forehead, and decision in the lower part of the face, which were only spoiled by the close proximity of his piercing black eyes, and the cynical expression of the hawk-like nose which separated them. His companion was equally dirty and equally sallow, but his countenance betokened at once a less powerful intellect, and a more amiable disposition.

"Coppery!" said Mr. Towser, in reply to his friend's complaint, "I should rather think so; why you were as drunk as David's

sow last night, and—but I wonder,” he said, thoughtfully interrupting himself, “why ‘as drunk as David’s sow?’ It might be asked, you know. I wonder if David himself used to get drunk, and the failing is euphemistically attributed to the unclean beast.”

“I don’t think so,” said Lippincot. “Noah got drunk, you know, but I think David was more given to other vices.”

“Perhaps he went in for wine as well,” said Towser, with a hideous laugh, “but I must take a note of this expression, and try and find out its origin. Less likely things have been asked.”

“You know the origin of the sign of ‘The Goat and Compasses?’” said Lippincot.

“Oh, of course I do,” said his companion hastily; “but now that we have done our breakfast, just run me through that new epitome of English history. I marked it carefully on Friday, and old Schlesser will work us up in the subject to-morrow morning.”

Lippincot took up the book referred to, which was entitled "The Civil Service Epitome of English History," by the author of "The Civil Service Shakspeare," "Ten Thousand Facts for Candidates for Competitive Examination," etc., etc., etc. This work contained all the "leading facts" in the history of our country, within the compass of a hundred small octavo pages; and lest the student in his consumption of this literary pemmican should confuse battles with treaties, or the names of books with the names of cities, the art of the typographer had been called into play, and every page in this interesting work looked like an article in a modern cyclopædia under the title, "TYPE (varieties of)," and indeed it was just about as interesting to read. The author had made his mark by the publication of "The Civil Service Shakspeare," an edition of the poet's works containing only such passages as had ever been set, or were

likely to be set to candidates at competitive examinations. Words whose meanings or derivations might be asked were also printed in italics; oft-quoted lines in small capitals, while a neat paraphrase (in the author's own modern Civil Service style) was appended, of such obscure passages as those commencing,

“To be or not to be ;”

* * * * *

or,

“ Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by . . .”

* * * * *

or,

“ He jests at scars that never felt a wound.”

* * * *

“ What was the date of the battle of Tinchebray ?” said Lippincot, referring to the book in his hand.

“ And Brenneville,” suggested Towser, “ they're always put together, 1106.”

“ Right,” said his interrogator, “ but I wonder why they are always put together.”

“ Oh hang it ! don’t go on asking why,” said Towser hastily, “ how the deuce do you suppose we could ever get through our work if we kept asking why ? Nothing makes old Schlesser so angry. Go on.”

Lippincot turned from the beginning to the middle of the book. “ Who was *Zimri*, in ‘ Absalom and Achitophel ’ ? ”

“ Duke of Buckingham,” rejoined Towser.

“ Right again ! ” said the other. “ Now I wonder if he was any relation of the present duke ? ”

“ Oh ! d—— the present duke,” cried Towser. “ They’ll never ask any questions about the present duke, if there is such a person. I’m sure I don’t know and don’t care. But do ask more sensible questions. Let me say over to you the dates of all the battles in the Wars of the Roses, or how many of Edward III.’s descendants were beheaded.”

“All right,” said Lippincot, turning to the page ; “try the battles.”

So Towser began. But he had not got any further than the first battle of St. Albans, when their studies were interrupted by a loud knock at the door ; and in answer to the invitation, conveyed in no gracious voice, to “Come in,” a somewhat showily dressed middle-aged woman entered the room.

To understand who she was, we must retrace our steps for some years in this faithful history. Sir Humphrey Perceval’s butler at Shipton Court, who bore the somewhat aggressive name of Towser, since he had abandoned that of James, together with his footman’s coatee (but who was really as mild an individual as a butler in a great house could be), had a brother. This brother, William Towser, kept a bacon and butter shop in the neighbourhood of Grosvenor Square, from which, by happy coincidence,

Sir Humphrey's establishment in town was regularly supplied.

William Towser, who always had a good eye to connection, had married a housekeeper in one of the great houses in the Square, and the fruit of this union, in addition to increased orders, had been two daughters and one son. Shortly before the birth of their third child, Mrs. Towser, unwarily crossing Oxford Street, would have infallibly been knocked down and run over by a dashing hansom cab, had not a tall gentleman perceived her danger, and rushing forward, dragged her, with rapid presence of mind, out of harm's way. The fright proved too much for her nerves, and Sir Humphrey Perceval, who was the tall gentleman, conveying her home in a four-wheeler, was struck with the familiar name over the door of her shop, and upon making further inquiries, discovered that the lady he had so gallantly rescued was the wife of one of the

family tradesmen, and the sister-in-law of the family butler. Hence a certain additional interest in Mrs. William Towser, and hence, on the happy birth, a few days afterwards, of a son and heir to the bacon and butter merchant, Sir Humphrey consented to stand god-father to the infant in whose existence he felt he almost had some concern, and who duly received in baptism the family name of his deliverer.

Perceval Towser grew and thrrove, and was from time to time shown to his god-father by his ingenuous parents; and Sir Humphrey, who was a very kind-hearted man, took an interest in the child. When this son was about ten years old, William Towser died somewhat suddenly, having over speculated in rum and other strong waters, which were entirely consumed on the premises; and the business, in spite of so many good connections, being found in a state of hopeless embarrassment, Mrs. Towser determined to

enjoy a comfortable home in some gentleman's house, and sought a situation as a house-keeper. Sir Humphrey, being informed of the catastrophe, which he had this time been unable to avert, though he had had more share in bringing it about than he was perhaps aware of, offered to pay for his godson's schooling ; and young Towser, being a very sharp boy, so pleased Sir Walter, who continued his protection after the old baronet's death, that when the lad had reached the age of seventeen, his new patron had not only acceded to his request to be allowed to leave school and "grind" for a year in London preparatory to going up for examination for the Indian Civil Service, but had made him a liberal allowance, to enable him to prosecute his studies with every advantage.

It was just a year since Perceval Towser had taken up his abode at Norfolk Street, Strand, in company with a chum of the

name of Lippincot ; and on the Sunday morning in May on which we have been introduced to them, it wanted but a few days to the all-important examination for which they have both been preparing themselves.

When, therefore, Mr. Towser said "Come in," and the door opened, it was his mother who stood before him.

"Shall I hook it ?" said Lippincot, seeing the intruder embrace Mr. Towser in somewhat demonstrative fashion, and proceed to clear a chair of books previous to seating herself thereupon.

"No, never mind," said the other ; and then turning to his mother, "What do you want ?"

"Want !" said she, "why to see how you are getting on. How are you getting on with your books, Percy ?"

"Oh, well enough : I should get on better at present if you would not come here interrupting me."

“ Well, you know you never come and see me ; though, indeed, I would not ask nor wish it,” said the old woman, “ that my son and Sir Humphrey Perceval’s godson, and such a scholar too, should come into the house-keeper’s room ; though indeed it’s a good deal smarter a room than this,” said she, looking round the comfortless apartment.

“ Oh, never mind, it suits me well enough,” said her son.

“ Have you heard from Sir Walter lately,” said Mrs. Towser after a pause.

“ Yes,” said the young man, “ I have. Yesterday he sent me a cheque for five and twenty pounds. He might as well have made it fifty. It would have been all one to him. He wouldn’t have felt the difference.”

“ Well, well, I daresay as how he wouldn’t,” said Mrs. Towser, “ but I do think he has behaved very handsome towards

you"—Here she was cut short by the recipient of Sir Walter's bounty, who informed her that he was too busy to listen to such trivial and inappropriate remarks ; and after a brief further conversation, the housekeeper retired from her son's apartment and, assisted by an omnibus which she hailed in the Strand, found herself at No. 35, Grosvenor Square—she being then up in town for the season—in time for a remarkably good dinner, with which she consoled herself for the want of affection displayed by her only son, and in due time went to sleep on the sofa in the housekeeper's room, as befitted the day, the time, and her own position.

A week afterwards Towser and Lippincot were "in for examination." Six weeks after that the list was out. The seventeenth name was that of Perceval Towser. But the name of Lippincot was nowhere to be found.

"Confound the fellow," said Towser

when he read the list and perceived, not without some satisfaction, that his companion's name was not included, "I'm not at all surprised, he was always asking 'Why?' and 'How?'

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Mr. and Mrs. Perceval went to bed on the night of their son's return from Eton, although the hour was somewhat later than usual, they neither of them felt inclined to sleep ; and after a few trivial remarks about the guests of the evening, Mrs. Perceval began, “Charles, don't you think Humphrey is growing up a fine fellow ? ”

“Just what I was thinking, Alice.”

“Don't you think we ought to see something more of him now that he is growing older—have him more with us.”

“Do you think so ? ”

“I do. He is as simple as a child as yet,

I can see ; but he is getting too old for such a condition. A man cannot think of nothing but cricket and shooting and riding."

"A great many do," said her husband, with a smile ; "but, of course, we have no wish that Humphrey should be a fellow of that sort. But what can we do ? He learns nothing at Eton, of course, and at Shipton——"

"There it is," said Mrs. Perceval ; "at Shipton he will not make up for the short-coming of his school education ; they are too much alike ; no, he must see something of people who think about and enjoy things beyond cricket-bats and pointers, thorough-bred mares and bow oars, or he will never learn to think about them, much less to enjoy them himself.

"How wise we are getting, my darling," said her husband. "But I dare say you are right : he must see a little more of us, eh ?"

"So long as we don't frighten him, I

think that is exactly what would be best for him."

"Frighten him! I am not in the habit of considering myself very alarming," said Charles Perceval, who, indeed, was one of the mildest of men.

"Oh, but indeed I think you might be very alarming to Humphrey, if you do not take care. Remember how much you know, and what a matter of course you think it, and how little he knows, and how much less he has thought. I watched his face when you were talking to Lord Blisworth to-night, and he looked quite bewildered. And, you see, he really knows very little of us."

"Quite true; but I think we did better in sending him to run about and get fine air and exercise at Shipton, rather than cooping him up in London during his holidays, or dragging him with us over Europe."

"It is certainly very difficult for people who have only a town-house to know what

to do with boys in their holidays," said Mrs. Perceval; "and I hope we did the best thing we could for Humphrey; but now that he is getting older, I think he should learn to know, and I hope to like, his parents."

"Yes," said her husband, "he will get air and exercise enough at Eton, and perhaps he may learn something if he spends his holidays with us, but I am afraid he will miss Shipton."

"We must go down there with him for part of the time, and do our best to make the rest of his holidays as pleasant to him as possible. We must take him abroad with us."

"I am afraid he can speak no language but his own," said Mr. Perceval, somewhat ruefully.

"Oh, he will soon pick one up—especially if we do not bother him to learn it. Let us travel in only one country, say France,

or France and Belgium, and he will soon know a little French. But what I think much more of than any language is, that he will probably learn *to think*; and above all, he will acquire his first impressions about foreign life and foreign travel from you, which cannot fail to do him good."

"Indeed, as far as that is concerned," replied her husband, "I think travelling abroad with the ordinary English notions as to things foreign and things English, which are a compound of the extreme of ignorance about the former with the extreme of conceit about the latter, intensified by a sort of vulgar self-consciousness which is only visible in the travelling Englishman, is calculated to do infinitely more harm than good to any young man; and yet nothing ought at the same time to cultivate and to enlarge the mind so much as travelling, that is, perhaps, in civilized countries."

"So you think he may come with us,"

said Mrs. Perceval, somewhat abruptly interrupting her husband's generalization.

"Certainly. We will all start for Paris as soon as you like. It will be very hot; but it's hot enough here, and we can go on into Auvergne if you wish."

"You are the best of men," said his wife, fondly; and after a little more conversation, in which the details of the plan so happily agreed upon were discussed with equal satisfaction, the father and mother dropped off to sleep in the sweet satisfaction of a new and a worthy interest.

Mrs. Perceval had seen but little of her son since he first went to school six years ago. As a kind and affectionate mother she had regretted it, but it seemed obviously more for her son's advantage, as well as for his happiness, that he should spend his holidays with his uncle in the country; and Mrs. Perceval had only thrown herself the more into her husband's life, and

found at once her duty and her pleasure in sharing his interests and partaking of his pleasures, and making both his life and her own, happy with her sweet sympathy.

Mr. Perceval, too, had seen but little of his son, and had thought much less about him than his wife. The duties of his office and his more onerous social and literary occupations, gave him little time to think of his young bowler and batter in the playing fields at Eton, and he contented himself with making him a liberal allowance of pocket money, and always hearing with interest of his welfare.

The time had now come when more was required of both parents. The mother had been the first to perceive this, and to communicate her discovery to her husband. He on his part had fallen in with her views, and was prepared to act upon the suggestions, which his head if not yet his heart told him were right.

“Humphrey, my boy,” said his father at breakfast next morning, “how should you like to come abroad with us this summer, instead of spending the whole of your vacation at Shipton?”

Humphrey looked rather astonished, turned to his mother, and seeing in her face a look of great interest, checked himself in the disappointment he was about to express at such a project, and said gently—

“Oh, I don’t know—I shouldn’t like to give up going to Shipton altogether; and then Uncle Walter, you know”— And he paused, not knowing quite how to go on.

“My dear boy,” said his mother, coming to the rescue, “your father and I have been thinking that you are growing up without living quite as much with us as is right: that is, we shall all be happier for being more together, and knowing more of one another. As long as you were a child it

was nothing, but now that you are almost a man, we cannot afford to lose any more time. Besides, you will see a great many things abroad of which you know nothing now, and that you will like very much.” There was something at once deeper and tenderer in Mrs. Perceval’s voice than in the words she uttered, and Humphrey was struck by it.

“Oh, my dearest mother,” said he, “it will be very jolly to be with you wherever you are, but won’t you come down to Shipton with me too?”

“Certainly, we will come back before the 1st of September, so you shall not lose your partridge shooting. I know you are looking forward to that. So you had better run down to Shipton at once for a day or two, and see Uncle Walter, and settle everything with him; and we will all start for Paris on Monday next, and all go together to Shipton on the 29th of August.”

“Capital,” said Humphrey, his fresh young sympathies carried away by the interest his mother showed in the plan. “Well, I wonder what I shall think of the Frenchmen? — I suppose I shan’t have to talk French. I don’t know a word.”

“Oh, well, we shall see about that,” said his father, “you must really make up your mind to enjoy yourself as much as you can, and you need learn nothing you don’t like. It would be very hard to have to learn anything in the holidays! wouldn’t it, Humphrey? Though indeed considering the amount you learn in school, you might like to play at learning something, just for a change!”

“Well,” said Humphrey, “it’s all very well to say we learn nothing at Eton, and indeed I don’t think we do learn much, but we take a vast amount of time and trouble about it!”

And so it came to pass that when

Humphrey went back to Eton two months after this conversation, he had not only enjoyed his partridge shooting at Shipton, and his father and mother's company abroad, but he had made some progress —without any difficulty—in French, and acquired an immense number of ideas on a variety of subjects, which had never hitherto had a place in either his school or holiday philosophy. His mind had begun to open. Happy those whose intellectual buds are opened by the sunshine of a mother's love, and nourished by the kindly rain of a father's sympathy. No age is more interesting, none perhaps is more dangerous, than that, when the seductive apples of the tree of knowledge of good and evil are first displayed to our sight. Happy is the man who is guided and influenced at the critical time of his youth, by a clever and sympathetic *woman*, be she mother or sister or friend, who reverses the old history of the

garden of Eden, and takes away man's inclination for the fruit that poisons and destroys, by the constant presentation of the rosy and golden apples of refined occupations, of ennobling pleasures, and of innocent love.

CHAPTER V.

IN the comfortable library of a comfortable old red-brick manor-house in one of the Midland counties, sat a father and daughter. The former looked aged and careworn, the latter was young, and more than commonly beautiful. Her height did not greatly exceed that of the *Venus de Medici*, and her form was almost as perfect. Her small and exquisitely shaped head was adorned with a profusion of dark brown tresses, which shaded her soft and regular features, and gave additional, and, as it were, sympathetic intensity to her dark brown eyes. She was simply dressed in a close-fitting grey gown, which set off

her maiden figure to the best advantage, while a bow or two of cherry-coloured ribbon introduced here and there, as if by accident, but knowingly enough, and with almost a Frenchwoman's appreciation of effective simplicity, lighted up the whole.

Sybil Mainwaring was just nineteen, and looked, perhaps, a year or two older; and her father, who sat opposite to her, though he had but just completed his tenth lustre, might have passed for one who had almost reached his threescore years and ten. His wife had died in giving birth to little Sybil, having previously presented him with two boys, Thomas and Harold, and he had found the bringing-up of his young family by no means an easy task. Of ancient lineage, with a rent roll of between two and three thousand a year, he had never cared for what is called Society, nor even for the ordinary amusements of an English country gentleman; and he had rather cherished his grief at his wife's loss,

and accepted the task of bringing up her children as a sad duty connected with her untimely death. He was not a man of any strength of character ; he was not what is called “a man of the world ;” and he wore himself away in the contemplation of the joylessness of his life, which he took such exceeding pains to make as joyless as possible. His wife had been a woman of a very different stamp ; and her greater decision and cheerfulness of character survived her in her daughter, who did as much to enliven the dull home as her little cherry-coloured bows did to light up her grey dress. But of course her influence could not be felt until many years after her mother’s death, and by that time her father had got beyond the power of medicine to “minister to his mind diseased,” even of that *aurum potabile*, that pearl of medicaments, the influence of a bright and loving woman. She had done her best to make home happy for her brothers, but

they were both older than she was, and the elder bullied and teased her cruelly as a child, partly as a relief from the oppressive dulness of home, and partly because he had a naturally bad heart, and amused himself as a bully until he was old enough to be a blackguard. Her second brother often took her part, with the result of getting thrashed himself, and increasing his sister's punishment when he was *hors de combat*; and in course of time, Harold, like many modern statesmen, who think themselves neither cowardly nor selfish, decided that the attitude most in accordance with his own "interests" was that of absolute non-intervention; so when he saw little Sybil with her long hair tied to the handle of the dining-room door previous to the sudden entrance of the butler with the luncheon, while Thomas sat on the sideboard swinging his legs and eating lump-sugar in anticipation of the catastrophe, Harold acted up to

his principles like a modern politician, and passed by on the other side like an ancient Levite. In course of time, Thomas, having been expelled from school, was sent at rather an early age into the army, and after some two or three years' service, during which he had got into one or two "scrapes," and had had his debts once paid by his father, who had to raise money on the estate for that purpose, he became involved in a "bill" transaction which brought his military career to a sudden and untimely end. What this "transaction" exactly was, was never very clearly explained; but a brother officer finding his name attached to certain valuable securities, under circumstances that made it clear that the signature had been written, not by himself, but by Cornet Thomas Mainwaring, called upon that young officer in company with a regimental friend, and having premised that he did not wish to send him into penal servitude, on account of

scandal to the regiment, and for the honour of the service at large, dictated to him the following conditions :

1. He must send in his papers that day.
2. He must not go out of barracks until he had paid the amount of the bills in question, and all his regimental debts.
3. He must then leave England, and never come back, on pain of instant exposure.

He had no choice but to agree. His father was sent for ; the entail was cut off, and the necessary funds raised for paying everything ; and Thomas Mainwaring, Esquire, left Liverpool for New York, travelling under the name of Charles Clifford, with “the world all before him where to choose his place of rest,” outside that Eden whence he, like our first parents, had been ignominiously driven. And as in the case of the primary Fall of Man, his sins were visited upon other heads besides his own. His father was heartbroken : his sister felt

it in her quiet way almost as deeply. His brother, who had been just gazetted into a regiment quartered in India, took it more philosophically, and chiefly regretted that his allowance of £200 a year was diminished to £100, because his brother, who had enjoyed an allowance of £600 a year, had run through something over £10,000 in thirty months ! But then he was an eldest son ; and everyone knows that if eldest sons are foolish or wicked, it is the younger children that must suffer.

And now, as Mr. Mainwaring and his daughter are sitting together in the old oak-panelled library at Silvermere, the eldest son of the house has been two years in America, drawing from time to time upon his father for large sums of money, to be spent in riot or lost at play.

“ I think the American mail is due here to-day,” said Sybil.

As she spoke, the tramp of the letter-

carrier was heard upon the gravel sweep, and a moment later the servant handed the morning's letters to Mr. Mainwaring.

“Yes, there is a letter from America,” said Mr. Mainwaring, dreamily, “but I don't recognize the handwriting.”

Sybil started.

“Can anything have happened to Tom?”

She instinctively glanced at the envelope. There was *no* black edge.

Her father broke the seal, and hastily read the contents.

“We must send for Mr. Slack instantly,” said he. “Ring the bell, Sybil.”

Mr. Slack was the family lawyer, and he arrived in the course of the afternoon. Mr. Mainwaring handed him the letter. Thomas had got into some gambling row at San Francisco, in which a man had been killed, and he had been sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. The letter was from the governor of the jail.

“ Well, at all events, he will not be able to draw upon us for some time,” said the man of law, after reading the letter and taking a practical view of the state of affairs.

“ But can nothing be done,” said Mr. Mainwaring, seeming scarcely to heed what he said. “ Cannot the Foreign Office, or the ambassador, or some one do some thing.”

“ Nothing whatever, my dear sir,” said Mr. Slack, in a by no means disconsolate voice. “ There is no use thinking of such a thing. At all events, he will be well cared for, and kept out of mischief where he is.”

Sybil was more sympathetic, but she could suggest nothing, and her father, feeling that something or other must be done, took to his bed and sent for the doctor.

The next day he sent for Mr. Slack again.

“ If I were to die, what would become of my property ? ”

“ Why, the entail has been cut off,” said

the attorney, “but if you leave no will everything will go to your eldest son, except the personal property, which will be divided equally between your children.”

“I must make a will.”

“I think you certainly ought to do so.”

“I will divide all my property among my children: but I have not settled in what shares. There is no hurry.”

“No hurry whatever,” said the lawyer.

“Will you make a draft of a will, leaving the proportion of the shares in blank, and we will settle it all when I am better. In a week shall we say, when I have a little got over this shock ?”

“Certainly, certainly ;” and Mr. Slack took his departure. But Mr. Mainwaring never got over the shock. The family doctor had been afraid of fever, and had “lowered” his patient to the full extent of his medical skill. Mr. Mainwaring was low enough in all conscience, both in body

and mind, and when by nature and art he was brought to that condition in which doctors usually adopt the brandy and champagne treatment, he was beyond all human remedies, and after a brief period of unconsciousness, he gradually sank, and died.

Mr. Mainwaring had very few relations. A cousin of the name of Pevensey was hastily summoned from London, and he came down to look after the funeral arrangements ; and he and Mr. Slack made a formal search for the will which they knew did not exist. Mr. Slack had a draft with the shares in blank ! Letters of administration were therefore taken out by the cousin Mr. Pevensey in the absence of nearer relations, Harold being in India with his regiment. There were but few debts ; but the land could not be touched, for it belonged to the outcast in jail at San Francisco ; so the furniture of the house, with the books, pictures, plate, jewels, and even the little knick-knacks and house-

hold gods, which had for the owner a value unknown to the maker of inventories, had to be sold. Sibyl had to leave her home to be given up to auctioneers and valuers ; Thomas was communicated with in his prison ; and a receiver under the control of the Court of Chancery was put over the property to collect and accumulate the rents for the absent proprietor.

Mr. Pevensey was not an unkind man, and he took Sibyl up to London to stay with him at a dull, formal house in Tyburnia, until her future should be decided upon. Mrs. Pevensey was a stiff, angular, cold-looking woman, something like the home she lived in, and poor Sybil felt utterly alone in the world. But what was she to do ? She had been highly educated, she had great natural intelligence, and she was well fitted for the only career open to her : she would be a governess. After winding up the administration, Mr. Pevensey found

a balance of just £300 in his hands, which was legally divisible into three shares. A hundred pounds was put aside for Thomas, a valuable addition to his two thousand a year, and Harold and Sybil were each formally presented with their fortune of £100. Mr. Pevensey was a practical man, and after a few months he succeeded in obtaining a “likely situation” for Sybil as governess to two young ladies whose father and mother were rich country people, and who lived in the west of England, a long way from her old home at Silvermere. Sybil called on Mrs. Osborne at Thomas’s Hotel, and it was agreed that she was to go down to Kelvedon Hall in the course of the next week.

CHAPTER VI.

KELVEDON HALL was a huge white stone pile, built in the worst taste of the end of the last century; but, uninviting as it looked, Sybil determined to find in it a home, and after a pompous introduction to her pupils, and a very distant recognition by Mr. Osborne, she went up to her own room; and before many days were over, she had gained the affections of the two girls who had received her at first with becoming coldness; and had written a cheerful letter to Harold to acquaint him with what she called her good fortune. Mr. and Mrs. Osborne lived on what the

world styles very good terms ; they never quarrelled in public, rarely perhaps in private ; they held strict religious opinions ; and in every way in which it did not affect them they led an austere life, and looked with a stern eye upon the foibles of their neighbours—a judgment which increased to the bitterest acrimony when the religious views of the neighbours in question were not perfectly in accordance with their own.

Why should strong religious feelings obliterate in the breasts of men what little kindly charity has been planted there by the Author of all religions, whose precepts the disputants profess to revere, and who says in repeated and emphatic words, that without Charity we are nothing ?

However, Mr. and Mrs. Osborne lived exemplary lives, according to their own notions ; they cared little for society, their principles forbade too much society ; they disliked town ; London society was pro-

nounced a sink of worldliness ; they were indifferent to music, past dancing, and bored by the play ; balls and concerts were accordingly pomps and vanities, and the theatre a snare of Satan.

But they were fond, like other religious people, of good living ; and they had a cook with a larger stipend than the curate of the parish ; an *entrée* was almost as much discussed as a dogma, and a *pâté* as much relished as a controversial argument. Mr. Osborne was fond of horses—the stables were filled with priceless animals with long pedigrees and thin legs, but with an extraordinarily small power of work, to judge by the extreme difficulty with which any of them were allowed to leave the stable-yard ; save when, blanketed and rollered, they capered every morning beneath slim grooms in the park. As to Mrs. Osborne's garden, it was stocked with the rarest flowers—the greater number of which never bloomed, and

were merely prized on account of their cost ; while greenhouses filled with exotics, shrubberies, rockeries, ponds, pits, and every other horticultural luxury, abounded at Kelvedon Hall.

As may be supposed, Mr. and Mrs. Osborne saw but little of each other. In the first place they did not care about each other ; they had little in common ; and I verily believe if they had been shut up in a room together for an hour, they would not have found anything to say to each other during that time. Besides, Mr. Osborne was fully occupied in his stable and in his study, examining Pandora's fetlocks, or the Rev. Mr. Faggot's report upon Protestant Heresies ; superintending the "firing" of Goldmine, or considering how gladly he would have adopted a somewhat similar mode of convincing the Rev. Capel Chasuble of the error of his ways.

Mrs. Osborne had too much to think of in

her housekeeping and her garden to do anything else, save on Sunday, when she diligently perused a volume of her favourite divine, and comforted herself with the thought that a large proportion of her acquaintances were far less profitably employed.

On these said Sabbaths, Mr. Osborne, in addition to his two regular attendances at church, would give an extra look at the stables, with a somewhat more solemn air than on week days, and after a rather better dinner than usual at 6.30, instead of 7.30, out of respect to the consciences of the servants and the sanctity of the day, he would assert his uncompromising and practical faith in the day of rest by going off fast asleep in his easy chair till bed time.

Geraldine and Henrietta, as may be supposed, did not come in for a very large share of parental notice in this admirable establishment, and though they were of a somewhat chilly disposition, they gradually

grew attached to Miss Mainwaring, who was at once young enough to take an interest and a share in their amusements, and sufficiently intelligent and well-informed to command their respect. But Sybil differed chiefly from most governesses in that she had plenty of common sense. And one of the results of this peculiarity was, that she completely and cheerfully accepted her new position. Girls who have been brought up in great houses always make the best poor men's wives ; it is your impecunious clergymen's or "military officers'" daughters that make extravagant and slatternly spouses, and complaining homes ; and it is young ladies of the same class who, as a rule, when engaged as governesses, "feel their position" so acutely that they spend the time which should be devoted to their pupils' education in looking for offence where none is meant on the part of their employers, and making themselves miserable because they

do not receive an amount of attention to which neither their talents nor their position in any way entitle them. Mr. and Mrs. Osborne saw very little of Sybil for some time after her arrival. It was not the custom of the house; and they more especially dreaded the presence of a young lady who “had known better days;” but gradually seeing more and more of her, as time went on, they found “Miss Mainwaring” neither huffy nor pushing, expecting no special attention, yet always ready to join in any general amusement that might be wished; retiring in society, but agreeable in conversation; willing to sing when asked, and unwilling to flirt; simply and quietly dressed, but always looking what she was—a thorough lady. So it came to pass that when Sybil had been a year at Kelvedon Hall, she found herself in the family circle rather in the position of a friend than of a salaried instructress. Still, she devoted her whole mind and well-nigh

her whole time to the education—not the mere instruction—of her young charges, and was as proud of them as she would have been of her younger sisters. It was only the thoughts of the dark figure in the western prison, and the lone brother under the eastern sun, that cast a shadow over her life which it at times required all the engrossment of work or of play to dispel.

CHAPTER VII.

NEARLY three years after our first introduction to young Humphrey Perceval, and the dinner-party given in his honour by his father and mother, and on a fine bright afternoon in the middle of May, in the old drawing-room in Queen Street, Mayfair, sits Mrs. Perceval, looking much as she did three years before, only a little paler; and with her is a young, a very young, Guardsman. A fine young fellow, about five feet ten in his stockings, with an erect figure, a small head, covered with deep-brown curling hair, regular features, deep blue eyes, and that fresh, clean, healthy looking

colour—at once delicate and manly,—which is so characteristic of well bred Englishmen of nineteen.

Humphrey Perceval (for it was he) was not quite nineteen, but he had been gazetted Ensign and Lieutenant in the Coldstreams a few weeks before, and had just returned from his first Levee, glorious in scarlet and gold and bearskin, and looking so fresh and so happy, and so fine a specimen of a thoroughbred young Englishman, that a less partial eye than his mother's would have looked at him with pleasure. He is grown in every way since we saw him last. He is more manly of course, but he is also more thoughtful looking, though his broad forehead is not perhaps quite balanced by an equal display of firmness and decision in the lower part of his face. His blue eyes are at once deep and bright, and his whole countenance lights up as he smiles, in a way that makes one feel that there

can be nothing very dark behind or within.

“And how are you feeling, dear mother?” says he, looking fondly up into her face.

“Oh, quite well, darling. But, tell me, what did you think of the Levee?”

But Mrs. Perceval was not quite well; and day by day, as the season wore on, she grew paler and paler, and even Humphrey, in the full flush of first military duties and first social pleasures, could not fail to mark the change.

Charles Perceval grew anxious.

Doctors were called in, who felt Mrs. Perceval’s pulse; talked about the weather; and said “it was nothing—a little want of tone.” A great physician was consulted, who auscultated and smiled, and who, having twenty patients waiting in his dining-room to be similarly auscultated and smiled at, had not time to talk about the weather, said “there was a decided want of tone,” and prescribed change of air.

So as the season drew to a close, Mr. and Mrs. Perceval and Humphrey went to Homburg, where the bright fresh air and inoffensive water brought a little colour back into the invalid's cheeks ; but the doctor said there was still “a great want of tone,” and that the patient must go to the Engadine. St. Moritz did not at all agree with Mrs. Perceval, and a winter abroad was pronounced essential.

So Humphrey went home to his regiment, and his father and mother journeyed south to Mentone. The young Guardsman paid them a short visit at one of the loveliest and one of the saddest of continental watering places ; and the ensuing spring found him with his regiment at Windsor—waiting for news.

Mentone had done his mother no good. Her bright and equable spirits almost persuaded her husband, who was so anxious to be persuaded, that she was no worse, but

strangers saw more clearly, and even the doctors shook their heads. Charles Perceval could not find it in his heart to write otherwise than hopefully to his son in England. He could not bring himself face to face with the dim fears that haunted him, by giving them expression upon paper.

So Humphrey felt rather than knew the danger. And so he lived from day to day—waiting for news. At last it came, one day early in May. He must go to Mentone at once. There was no difficulty about leave. Of course not. He would start by the Calais mail next morning. Arrived in Paris, he had just time to eat a hurried dinner, drive across Paris, and present himself at the ticket window of the Lyons Railway. It was before the days of the Corniche Extension.

“Nice. First class.”

“The distribution of tickets for Nice is over,” said a woman in a white cap from behind a wire grating.

"How over? the train does not start for ten minutes."

"Just so, the distribution for all stations beyond Marseilles is suspended ten minutes before the departure of the train. You can yet take a ticket for Marseilles if you are so minded."

Humphrey did so with something between a groan and a curse.

"Of course I can take a ticket on to Nice when we arrive at Marseilles."

"That I am not able to tell you," said the woman stolidly. "It will be necessary to address yourself to the appointed officer when you shall have arrived at Marseilles."

Having comfortably established himself in a through carriage labelled Nice, Humphrey was ignominiously expelled therefrom at the very last moment by the guard who examined his ticket, and thrust into a carriage with seven Germans, five of whom smoked without intermission throughout the night

while the other two kept the windows hermetically closed. At midday the train arrived at Marseilles, and Humphrey dashed out in search of the ticket office. It was a long way off. The “service of arrival” and the “service of departure” were separate. They seemed to have even opposing interests. They were certainly divided by every barrier that human ingenuity could devise. At length after making a dash through an opening unguarded by anything more capable of resistance than a placard *Le public n'y entre pas*, Humphrey found himself before the ticket window. There was a file or “tail” of persons waiting their turn. Fretting and fuming the poor boy had to wait his. At length it came.

“Nice, quick !” said he.

“The distribution of tickets for Nice takes place only two hours hence.”

“Two hours hence ! I want to go by the express that starts in five minutes.”

“The distribution of tickets for the express takes place at the other window.”

“And where is that?” said Humphrey hurriedly.

“The second on the right,” said the authority blandly; “but it has been closed for five minutes.”

“Yes,” said the official on duty outside the window, in confirmation and with great politeness, “Monsieur will not be able to take the express train.”

Humphrey was in despair. “The station master,” said he to the bland official, “I must see him,—I must go by this train.”

The man smiled. “When the distribution of tickets shall have been completed I will go and inform Mr. Chief Station Master of your desire to see him.”

Humphrey rushed from the spot to regain the train; determined to try at all hazards to reach Nice that day without a ticket, if he could not do so with one. But by the time he

had reached the platform where he had left his carriage, the express was already on its way to Toulon, and Humphrey, taking the slow train which started three hours later, did not reach Nice until past midnight. It was impossible to get horses at such an hour ; so that, in spite of all Humphrey's exertions, the next morning was already far advanced as his carriage clattered into Mentone and the coachman made his devious way to the villa where the Percevals had spent the winter.

The door was opened by Charles Perceval, and Humphrey at once saw in his face that he had arrived too late ! All was over.

“ My dear, dear father,” was all that the son could say as he embraced him. Charles Perceval made no reply. He could say nothing. He had nourished hope when there was no hope ; his only thoughts had been those begotten of wishes, until at length a reality from which there was no turning

away had dealt him a crushing blow, and stunned him for ever. Aye, for ever; for although he recovered for the time, and returned by easy stages and much idle and desultory travelling to England, he never was again the same man as he had been before the visit of the Reaper to his happy home, and the transplanting of the sweet flower of his life into the gardens of Paradise.

* * * * *

Charles Perceval lived on in the old house in Queen Street, Mayfair. He sought distraction in his books and the work of his office, and his son was constantly with him, devoting the frequent intervals of military duty to his society.

So they lived for many months. Humphrey began to go out a little into the world: his father lived as much alone as ever.

At length, one day, as they were sitting together after dinner, the widower said—

“Humphrey, this sort of life will never do for you.”

“What do you mean, father?”

“Why, I mean that you will be of age in a few days, and you must not spend all your days moping in a little London street. You must go more into society. You must go and pay some visits in the country, and, above all, you must go to Shipton. You haven’t seen your Uncle Walter for an age.”

Humphrey resisted, but it was evident that his father was quite right; and it was at length arranged that they should both go down together that day fortnight to Shipton Court, and that Humphrey should afterwards pay two or three country visits by himself.

Among the guests at Shipton was Mr. Osborne, and before he left the house it had been arranged that Humphrey should go and spend a few days at Kelvedon Hall. In due time a more formal note arrived from Mrs. Osborne, and a fortnight after, Humphrey

found himself on the way “to avail himself of her kind invitation.”

“ You had better look out,” said his uncle, as they parted. “ There’s a daughter that I suppose Mrs. Osborne will want you to marry !”

“ Never fear,” said Humphrey, lightly ; “ I think I can look after my own heart.”

CHAPTER VIII.

KELVEDON HALL was a large house standing in a fine old park, in which, some two or three hundred yards in front of the mansion, there was a large sheet of artificial water. This was spanned by a long wooden bridge or causeway, with a rustic balustrade, on which the carriage drive was taken across the lake.

One afternoon Sybil and the two girls were standing on the bridge, leaning over the parapet, throwing bits of bread to the fish which were playing near the surface. Deeply absorbed in this innocent amusement, they started suddenly on hearing the sound

of wheels crackling on the crisp gravel, and Sybil, who had been leaning over a weak rail of the parapet, pushed sharply against it in recovering herself: it gave way, and she was precipitated into the water.

The girls screamed, but Henrietta had presence of mind enough to seek assistance from the innocent cause of the accident, in the shape of a fly well loaded with luggage, which had already reached the spot where they stood—near the middle of the bridge. There were far too many horses in the Kelvedon stables, and the horses themselves were much too valuable, to admit of visitors being fetched from the railway station, some three miles distant; and the fly, which pulled up at Henrietta's excited command, was laden with a visitor's luggage, and occupied by the visitor himself.

Astonished at the abrupt stoppage of his conveyance, and still more astonished at the frightened faces of Henrietta at the window

and Geraldine in the background, it took Humphrey Perceval some seconds to understand the position of affairs. Only a very few seconds, however; for in less than half a minute he had divested himself of his coats and other "wraps," and was looking over the bridge into the water.

"She fell in just here," said 'Etta, pointing to the broken rail.

But she was nowhere to be seen.

"She has sunk!" screamed 'Diny, "she will be drowned."

Humphrey did not hesitate a moment. His Eton education had taught him at least to swim, and he plunged into the water, and dived deep after the lost and unknown lady. He caught her at once—she was not quite insensible—and he rose with her quickly to the surface. But how was he to get her out? The floor of the bridge was some eight feet above the level of the water, and he must swim with her to the bank, which was but

thirty or forty yards distance, but which even to a strong swimmer like Humphrey, when hampered with thick wet garments and supporting a drowning woman similarly encumbered, seemed, and indeed was, a long and a weary way. Once, indeed, he thought he should never accomplish it, as his burden, with a struggle, dragged him under water ; but he never thought of freeing himself.

“ For Heaven’s sake, keep still, or we shall both be drowned ! ” cried he, as he struggled bravely onward.

And Sybil, who was as brave as he was in her own way, did keep still. A few more strokes and he touches the bank. The fly-man, as well as 'Etty and 'Diny, are there to seize the saviour and the saved, and they are both once more on dry land. Sybil, who had never quite lost consciousness, was packed into the fly with Henrietta : the man was ordered to drive to the house as fast as his lean horse could get over the ground, while

Humphrey walked up after them with 'Diny. It was his first visit to Kelvedon, and he certainly was making his first appearance in no ordinary way.

There was something in this a little flattering to his youthful vanity, which indeed needed some salve, as he contemplated his outward appearance. Most people, when they pay their first visit at a smart house, desire to look their best ; and when the house contains smart young ladies, and the visitor is a young guardsman of one-and-twenty who piques himself upon being invariably well dressed, this natural desire is not likely to be any weaker than usual.

Humphrey was in his shirt-sleeves, his coats having been left in the fly to cover Sybil ; he had lost his hat in the lake ; his remaining garments were of course dripping and black with water and mud, and his hair matted with green water-weed. Never was there so bedraggled-looking a young guardsman !

It is true that he had just performed a heroic action, but for the moment he thought more about the absurdity of his appearance ; he had just escaped a deadly peril, but he thought more of his meeting his hostess in his present highly unconventional garb.

'Diny was too much disturbed in her mind by her fright to be able to set her unknown companion much at his ease ; and furthermore, she was at that somewhat awkward age or stage of life through which girls pass between fourteen and seventeen, when they are just old enough to be conscious, like David Copperfield, of their extreme youth, and just young enough to be treated as if they were conscious of nothing beyond "Mangnall's Questions"—when they are tired of playing with dolls, and are not yet allowed to play with men.

It is an age typified by their skirts, which are neither long nor short, but hang about their ankles, like ill-made curtains that are

too short for the doors or windows against which they are hung.

In the first seventeen years of a woman's life, the rise or fall of the petticoat is an infallible, or as it were a barometric test, by which her age may be told at a glance ; and it is the want of mobility in this barometric garment, that makes her age from seventeen to seventy-seven so very uncertain.

So Humphrey and 'Diny walked along side by side and almost in silence, until they got close to the house, when 'Diny's womanly tact, which was somewhat in advance of her petticoats, led her to say, after a little gulp :

“Would not you like to go in by the side door, and then you can get some dry things before you see mamma ?”

Humphrey jumped at the suggestion with most plebeian alacrity.

“Oh, thank you ; certainly ; please.”

'Diny rang the side-door bell, and delivered

over Humphrey to a footman, who appeared in powder and shorts, and who received Humphrey with a completely imperturbable face—exactly as if the invariable way for guests to arrive at Kelvedon was to be first dragged through a pond; and having learned the guest's name, he showed him to his room, where his baggage in a few minutes followed him. Sybil was put to bed, and warm applications, both external and internal, soon brought her round, and after a good night, she awoke as fresh as ever next morning. Nor was the “goodness of her night” in any degree marred by the vague sensation, half dream, half recollection, of a strong arm clasping her delicate form, and a kind voice telling her not to fear. And she did not fear a bit !

Humphrey made his first appearance—in faultless evening dress—as the guests were assembling for dinner, and felt decidedly uncomfortable, partly at not knowing Mrs.

Osborne by sight, and much more so from the dread of being set upon and gushed at for his conduct in rescuing the young lady on his arrival. His fears were without foundation. Mrs. Osborne walked up to him with outstretched hand as he entered the room, and made so very slight an allusion to the "rescue," that Humphrey, although decidedly relieved, was actually somewhat disappointed.

"I hope the young lady is no worse for her swim," said he lightly to 'Etta, to whom he had just been introduced, as "my eldest daughter," and whose skirts were as long as her lately "come out" position warranted, and somewhat longer than was consistent with her free movement in every direction.

"Thank you, Miss Mainwaring has almost got over her shock; she has gone to bed, and I hope she will be all right in the morning. But I do not know what we

should have done if it had not been for you."

"Oh, I'm only so glad I happened to be passing at the time," said Humphrey quickly. "Miss Mainwaring?—did you say?—is a great friend of yours?"

"She is our governess—that is to say 'Diny's, my sister's," said 'Etta Osborne, remembering that as a "come out" young lady, she could not have a governess, "but she is a great friend, too; she is so nice; not a bit like an ordinary governess. I think you are to take me down to dinner." And the company filed off.

The dinner was excellent. The Vice-president of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was there, and seemed specially to enjoy his crimped salmon and *pâté de foie gras*; and after the ladies had left the room, Mr. Osborne carried on an argument upon the Question of Justification by Faith only, with an eminent divine, over

some Château Lafitte, whose production Dr. Ormston would certainly have qualified as an undoubted good work ; and whose due appreciation and consumption he appeared to consider incumbent upon an earnest Christian.

CHAPTER IX.

IT is, perhaps, not to be wondered at that Sybil should have blushed and felt a little confused next morning after prayers, when she was formally introduced to her preserver; and it is certain that she looked prettier than ever, and indeed completely charming amid her blushes and her confusion.

Humphrey quite agreed with Henrietta's remark of the evening before, that Sybil was "not a bit like an ordinary governess;" indeed, he thought she was very far from being an ordinary young lady of any kind. They made very merry over their *introduction*.

tion, and Humphrey told the well-known French story of the ideal Englishman, who refused to jump overboard after a drowning countryman, on the ground that, not having been previously introduced to him, the man in the water might resist his taking such a liberty as to pick him out. Humphrey hoped that Miss Mainwaring's code of social propriety was not quite so severe, and that he had not done wrong in forestalling Mrs. Osborne's formal introduction that morning.

Sybil smiled as she said "not at all," and Humphrey thought her more charming than ever. And so the breakfast passed off pleasantly enough. But Mrs. Osborne looked a little glum, and thought that the young guardsman might have paid more attention to Henrietta, and less to her governess, who was only present at the family breakfast inasmuch as the party in the house was a small one, and Mrs. Osborne

thought it would do 'Diny no harm at her age to see how grown-up people behaved at the morning meal ; and Mr. Osborne, who piqued himself upon everything about the place being perfect of its kind, and in apple-pie order, did not care to be reminded that a smart young man, on paying his first visit to Kelvedon, should find his pet bridge broken down, and his governess struggling in the water.

Without exactly going the length of the Englishman in the French story, Mr. Osborne did think that it was a misfortune that *his* daughters and *his* governess should be so much indebted to a stranger for succour. It was a great pity that some of the establishment had not been there to pick Miss Mainwaring out of the water, into which she had clearly no business to fall—especially at so very inopportune a moment.

Mr. Perceval could not, perhaps, have

acted otherwise than he did, but he had put Mr. Osborne under an obligation, a thing which he had no right to do. Of course he did not for a moment regret that Sybil had been rescued. God forbid ! But as it had clearly been ordained by Providence that she should not be drowned upon that occasion, he wished that Providence had gone just a little further, and that she had been quietly pulled out of the water by the keeper or one of the farm labourers.

Providence had not treated him quite as well in this matter as a person of Mr. Osborne's position, to say nothing of Mr. Osborne's piety, deserved. His egg, too, was not enough boiled by fully half a minute, and the second edition of dry toast was a trifle hard ; and altogether he considered himself decidedly hardly used, and only got himself into a holier frame of mind in the course of the morning, by administering stinging rebukes to the carpenter,

who should have looked after the bridge-railings, and to a groom who had not only allowed himself to be run away with by Aerolite that morning, but had failed to make his appearance at family prayers.

Humphrey was glad to be able to plead a slight indisposition, and withdraw as soon as the inevitable tour of the stables was accomplished, to take a walk with the young ladies, and of course with their fair companion.

Throughout the week of his visit, indeed, he showed as great partiality for the girls' society as if he had been an old bachelor of seventy, and developed a sudden proficiency in the art of croquet and the science of field botany, which would not have disgraced an eligible modern curate in a country parish.

Mr. Osborne made up his mind that he was a milksop. Mrs. Osborne decided that

he had fallen in love at first sight with Henrietta, and complacently regarded the possibilities and advantages of her daughter eventually becoming Lady Perceval—for Humphrey's expectations had been most conscientiously investigated before he had been asked to stay at Kelvedon Hall—while poor Humphrey was leading a new kind of life in a new world ; a fairyland into which he had entered, not to say leaped, when he sprang over the broken balustrade of the bridge on the Kelvedon drive ; and he thought neither of what he was doing, nor of whither he was going. The very air seemed so much lighter, and the whole world so much brighter than of old, that he trod the earth like Ulysses, and felt as if his very body, as well as his soul, had wings.

And was Henrietta the cause of all this ? It could scarcely have been so. For “whene'er they took their walks abroad” and divided themselves, as all parties of four people do

divide themselves—into two couples, the first couple consisted of Henrietta and her sister, and the second couple of the young guardsman and the young governess.

And indeed it was Sybil who was the Queen of Humphrey's Fairyland !

But the strangest part of it all was, that she too was living in a world far above the schoolroom; and the flowers she plucked in the hedgerows with Humphrey might have been of rubies, and sapphires, and diamonds, like the blossoms in Aladdin's garden, and each painted croquet ball formed of a single pearl, to be in harmony with the enchanted palace of her young imagination, and of the enchanted prince who was the lord of this fairy mansion.

And the prince was Humphrey.

People who have never lived in a fairy palace, or who have left it long ago for a front and back drawing-room, covered with Brussels carpet, and hung with a white and

gold paper, and who are regularly brought face to face with the cook's bills and the butcher's book, will say that these two young people were acting very improperly. The young guardsman had no right to make love to his neighbour's governess, even if he intended to marry her, which, being a man of proper feelings, he could never think of doing; and the young governess had still less right to fall in love with her neighbour's guardsman, and carry on a shameful flirtation with him under the very eyes of her mistress, and as it were under the cloak of her pupils. After all, perhaps Mr. Perceval had a right to "amuse himself" if he chose, but Miss Mainwaring was clearly paid to walk with 'Etta, and not with 'Etta's possible admirers—and to teach 'Diny French and Music, and not the art of judiciously chaperoning her friends when they chose to go out flirting.

Indeed they were both very much to blame. But they were neither of them perfect. It is really very unfortunate ; but they were not ; and there is no use in saying that they were. The fact is, that when two people plunge suddenly into Fairyland, especially if they take the plunge at the same moment, they are apt to forget, at all events for a short time, the world of Brussels carpets and butchers' books, and think of nothing but their own sweet enchanted and enchanting selves. The highways of earth are so very dusty to those who are in love, and the paths of Paradise are so very green and soft, and so bright and so sweet with glorified flowers, and so gay with the song of glorified birds, that we ought to be only too glad to let the poor lovers, who are but men and women after all, make their walk last as long as it will. They will come back to earth again soon enough, never fear ; and if "'tis better to have loved and lost than

never to have loved at all," how much better still is it to have walked or flown a stage of the journey of life hand in hand with a Fairy queen in the meads of Arcady, even if the remainder of the journey must be performed along the dustiest highways of earth in second-class carriages and four-wheeled cabs. But a governess, with duties to her pupils: duties to her employer. It is shameful! Ah, madam, you cannot buy hearts for £100 a year. The salary is liberal. But it won't do.

And so it came to pass that Humphrey and Sybil, as innocently and as spontaneously and as thoughtlessly and as happily as any two young creatures that ever looked into each other's eyes to see the reflection of each other's happiness, fell in love with each other, and found it the pleasantest thing in the world.

At length, however, one night, as Humphrey was retiring to rest, it flashed upon

him that, according to the terms of his invitation, his visit should terminate on the morrow, and he began to wonder, first, how he should get a fly to take him to the station, and, secondly, what he should do without Sybil. It was quite a new idea ; and by no means an agreeable one, but it induced him to think over his and her position.

Humphrey was no vulgar flirt : he was still further from being a heartless seducer—the idea of such a thing had never entered his head. But *marriage* ! He had thought just as little of that. It was a serious practical step. He had certainly never seen anybody whom he admired so much as Miss Mainwaring, no one with whom he could live so happily, and with whom, above all, he so completely sympathized : but still he had known her such a short time, a few days : and then he was so young. Perhaps she would not have him.

The last objection did not cause him much uneasiness. But, then, if she did care about him, he ought not to abandon her. Abandon her! indeed that was very far from his mind. He would rather take her away with him the next day. But that clearly could not be done. Had he behaved badly towards his host and hostess? They had certainly not asked him to Kelvedon to carry off their governess. Altogether it was very puzzling, and before Humphrey had made up his mind either as to what he ought to do or what he would do, he fell asleep. The next morning he found out the last train to London, commissioned the butler to procure a fly, and determined to spend as much of the day as he could with Miss Mainwaring, and perhaps come to some understanding with her. But fate decreed it otherwise. As soon as the ladies had left the breakfast room, Mrs. Osborne said, "Miss Main-

waring, Mrs. Beech and Miss Beech want to go over and see Crackenbury castle, and I had intended to go with them, but I have got rather a headache this morning. I wish you and 'Diny would go instead. You don't mind, do you ?" she added, in a tone of voice which said, Go up and put on your bonnet at once.

"Oh, of course, I shall be very glad," said Sybil. "What o'clock is the carriage ordered for ?"

"Eleven," said Mrs. Osborne, looking at Mrs. Beech, "that will quite suit you, I hope ?"

"Oh quite. So kind of Miss Mainwaring to come and show us the way," said Mrs. Beech mechanically. "Hope we are not taking you away from"—Mrs. Beech paused a moment, not knowing quite what she might be supposed to be taken away from,—while poor Sybil's heart leaped to her mouth—"from your practising ?"

“Oh no, not the least in the world,” said the governess hastily, relieved, she scarcely knew why.

“I think you had all better go and put on your bonnets at once,” said Mrs. Osborne. “It is just a quarter to eleven. I have ordered plenty of luncheon to be put in the carriage; it’s a charming place for a pic-nic, and you will be back, I hope, to tea about five.”

“Thanks so much—very kind,” replied the guest as she moved off.

In twenty minutes Sybil with 'Diny and Mrs. and Miss Beech were bowling along the road to Crackenbury, and a few minutes later Humphrey re-entered the house and repaired as usual to the school-room. It was empty. Where could they be? Not gone out yet? and without him? It is true Miss Mainwaring did not know he was going away that day. But still. He went down to the drawing-room. There

he found Mrs. Osborne, who, congratulating herself on having disposed of “those dull Beeches” for the rest of the day, had forgotten her headache, and having just looked through the *menu* of an exceedingly good dinner for that evening, was turning over the leaves of the Illustrated London News, which had arrived that morning.

“Oh, Mr. Perceval,” said she, “so sorry we are going to lose you to-day”—she thought Humphrey had forgotten that fact—“I am afraid we cannot send you to the station. Mr. Osborne is so particular about the horses, and the road to Hornby is so very stony.”

“Thank you, I have already ordered a fly,” said Humphrey, quietly. “I have taken the liberty of fixing the four o’clock train, the last to London, as the one I shall go by, in order that I may put off as long as possible the conclusion of so pleasant a visit.”

Mrs. Osborne smiled and bowed her acknowledgment of the compliment.

“I am so glad you have enjoyed yourself. Hope you will come again some other time. Pray write and offer yourself whenever you are next in this part of the world. What are you thinking of doing this morning?”

“I was thinking of taking a walk with —Miss Osborne,” said Humphrey, deceitfully.

“I will ring and ask where she is. ’Diny and Miss Mainwaring have gone off with Mrs. Beech and her daughter to spend the day at Crackenbury.”

It was fortunate that Humphrey, having advanced to anticipate his hostess in ringing the bell, should have had his face turned away from her as she finished her sentence. But he said nothing.

There was a slight pause, and the footman appeared.

“Tell Mrs. Parker to let Miss Osborne

know that Mr. Perceval is ready to go out walking with her."

"Yes 'm."

Humphrey had recovered. After all, in the absence of Sybil, perhaps the pleasantest thing to do would be to take a walk with Henrietta. At any rate, he could talk about the governess, towards whom Miss Osborne always seemed very kindly disposed.

After a few commonplace remarks to Mrs Osborne, 'Etta came in, and they sallied forth together, leaving Mrs. Osborne more than ever convinced of the justness of her surmises, and inclined to give Providence a self-satisfied pat on the back for sending such a highly eligible young man to Kelvedon, and making him so speedily take a fancy to her eldest daughter

But Henrietta knew much better.

It is true she was only just "come out," but she was quite woman enough to see that

Humphrey was not a bit in love with her, and that he was over head and ears in love with Miss Mainwaring. So she thought she would at least tease him a little.

“I am afraid you will find your walk very dull to-day, Mr. Perceval,” said she, as soon as they had got well out of the hall-door.

“Why? How do you mean?” said Humphrey, rather confusedly.

“Oh, we are such a much smaller party than usual.”

Humphrey muttered something about “little and good,” in supposed allusion to the size of the present party, but remembering that Miss Osborne was about five feet seven, while Sybil did not stand above five feet two in her slippers, he grew more confused, and held his tongue.

“Well, where are we going to?” said his tormentor.

“Oh, wherever you like.”

“But you sent for me to take a walk ; the least you can do is to suggest somewhere to go to. It is the hardest thing in the world to choose for oneself.”

“Well, shall we walk through the glen and round the Crow Wood ?” suggested Humphrey, desperately.

“Very well. It is scarcely a new or original idea ; but all the walks about here are the same to me. I know them all by heart. (Pause.) But did you send for me to walk through the glen and round the Crow Wood ?”

“I did not send for you at all,—at least, —that is to say—I should not have ventured to send for you ; your mother sent for you.”

“I suppose you told her you would like to take a walk with me ?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you come and fetch me in the schoolroom as you always do ?”

“I did.”

“And was no one there?”

“No one.” This so blankly, that Henrietta laughed a malicious little laugh.

“Ah, I am afraid no one is here!”

“What do you mean, Miss Osborne?”

“I am afraid I must have misunderstood you when you asked me to take this walk with you—through the glen and round the Crow Wood,” interrupted ’Etta.

“Oh no; quite the contrary. But I am going away to-day,” said he, somewhat inconsequently.

“I’m very sorry,” said she, unaffectedly; “and I am sure Miss Mainwaring will be very sorry too.”

Humphrey felt that ’Etta was not such a bad girl after all.

“Shall I say good-bye to her from you? I am afraid you will be gone before she comes back. When do you start?”

Humphrey felt that he decidedly liked ’Etta.

“A little after three,” said he.

“Do you remember my telling you that Miss Mainwaring was very nice, and not at all like an ordinary governess? Don’t you think I was right?”

“Quite right; you were quite right. She is indeed very nice.”

Humphrey thought he had said enough.

“Do you know that until her father’s death she lived at a very fine place; and that it is only because all the property was entailed upon some one in America, or something of the sort, that she was left so poor that she had to go out as a governess?”

“No, indeed,” said Humphrey, much interested.

“Oh yes; she had no mother, and she used to keep house and have the ordering of everything; and I should think she must have felt the change dreadfully; but she was so good; she never complained, or even

said a word about her old home ; and she was always so cheerful and kind. And she seemed quite happy."

"I have no doubt you have a good deal to say to that," said Humphrey, almost tenderly.

"Oh, indeed, I don't know. I think she would have made herself happy anywhere, for she is so good that she would have made everybody happy about her."

This highly philosophical remark was but fuel to the fire in Humphrey's breast, which at that moment had certainly no need of it ; and it was as much as he could do to prevent himself from breaking forth into a declaration of his passion for Sybil to Miss Osborne, but he succeeded in checking himself, and turning the conversation into less dangerous paths during the remainder of the walk.

'Etta was really fond of Sybil. She did not care the least in the world for Hum-

phrey, and was therefore not at all inclined to be jealous of her ex-governess ; and being, like every woman, a "matchmaker" at heart, she returned home by no means dissatisfied with her first essay.

CHAPTER X.

HUMPHREY left Kelvedon that day at half past three, and the Crackenbury party arrived about five. When Sybil went upstairs to her room to take off her bonnet, there was a knock at the door and 'Etta came in.

“Mr. Perceval was sorry not to see you to say good-bye, but he gave me this note for you before he went.”

“What! is he gone?” said Sybil, her colour leaving her cheeks, and then rushing back in a hot blush.

“Yes,” said 'Etta, quietly, “he left at half past three. It seems it was always

arranged that he was to go to-day. You look tired, Mannie dear, shall I bring you up a cup of tea?"

"No, thanks, darling. It was rather a long drive—don't mind me, go and have tea ; I will follow—or perhaps I won't have any."

Etta understood, and gave her a kiss, and left her to read the following letter.

"MY DEAR MISS MAINWARING,

"I am very sorry to have to leave Kelvedon without saying good-bye to you. The time has flown so fast in your company, that I had forgotten that the day fixed for my going away was so near, and when I looked for you this morning to tell you that it had arrived, I found you had gone out for the day ; and I had to content myself by reviving pleasant memories in a walk with Miss Osborne.

"I hope we may meet again soon, not

merely to repair the omission of saying good-bye to-day ; I hope I may have something more interesting to say to you. Perhaps I might have even found something to say to-day, had you not flown off with that singularly uninteresting Mrs. Beech, and left me behind—like Lord Ullin's daughter—lamenting ! I hope when you next come up to London either to see your own people or with the Osbornes, you will let me know. Meanwhile, I fear I have nothing better to do than to sign myself

“Very truly yours,

“ HUMPHREY PERCEVAL.

“ 17, QUEEN STREET, MAYFAIR.”

Sybil read the letter over twice, she then folded it carefully up and put it away in her desk, took it out again, re-opened it and read it once more. What might he have said ? Will he ever say it ? And shall we ever meet again ? Sybil pleaded a sudden head-

ache, and remained in her room for the rest of the evening.

She had need of quiet and solitude to think over her present position. She must ask herself some home questions, and not shrink from the answer. Was she in love with Humphrey Perceval? Yes. Did he care for her? She thought so. Had she any right to think so? His letter said nothing. He might be merely flirting with her? She did not think he would do that.

But was his love honourable? or the contrary? The very thought pierced her like a knife. What might not be the love of a guardsman for a governess?

No! she could not, she would not believe it. If Humphrey in a few days had stolen her heart, he had at least left her in exchange a feeling of respect as well as of love for himself. But had she any right to love him? Was not she a penniless girl,

and was not he to be a rich baronet some day? Would not his great relations say that she had “caught” him; that he had been caught by a governess, who ought to have been looking after her pupils? And had she neglected her charge? Would Mrs. Osborne be quite pleased if she knew what had been going on?

And had she been quite doing her duty to her? It was very difficult to find satisfactory answers to many of these questions, and poor Sybil was compelled to have recourse to a flood of tears. Her sobs would have softened a much harder and less sympathetic heart than Humphrey’s, had he been at hand, but they had no effect upon poor Sybil’s confidant and confessor—“the man within the breast”—that pure and true conscience, that moral sense, which gave such uncompromising answers to the questionings of her heart. So she made up her mind that she must send no answer to

Mr. Perceval's letter, and that she must do her best to forget the writer. The last would be of course impossible. The former might be done. So she took out the letter again, and reading it over to the last words as if she had never read it before, remarked as if for the first time:— “17, *Queen Street, Mayfair.*” “He evidently means me to answer the letter, for although he wrote it here, he gives me his London address. It would be very rude not to send him some reply.”

So she got out her writing desk and began with her best pen:—“Dear Mr. Perceval,” and not knowing quite what to say next, began thinking again as she had thought before, and ended by tearing up the sheet of paper, throwing down the best pen, and having another “good cry.”

And so Sybil carried out the first article

of her resolution, and did not write to Humphrey Perceval ; and so she carried out the second article by thinking of him all day and a good part of the night, inasmuch as she kept the intention she had arrived at, of forgetting him as speedily as possible, continually before her mind. So passed a week, two weeks, part of a third, when the following letter arrived:—

“ MY DEAR MISS MAINWARING,

“ I wrote you a hurried line the day I left Kelvedon, partly to apologise for my seeming rudeness in leaving Kelvedon without saying good-bye to you, and thanking you for your very great share in making my visit as pleasant as it was. Possibly Miss Osborne forgot to give you the letter, or you did not think it worth while to answer it ; but I should be very glad to hear that you were well, and have not been falling into any more lakes in my

absence. I sincerely hope, at any rate, we may soon meet again, and that an acquaintance so romantically begun and so pleasantly carried on—at least as far as I am concerned—should not be ended as suddenly as it was commenced. It only remains for you to say you do not wish to end it with *cold water*. I shall be with my regiment in Town for some months to come.

“Very truly yours,

“HUMPHREY PERCEVAL.

“17, QUEEN STREET, MAYFAIR.”

It was quite evident that the letter must be answered; even the “Confidant and Confessor” agreed. But what was she to say? After much thought, and one or two failures, she dispatched the following :—

“DEAR MR. PERCEVAL,

“I must apologise for not having answered your first letter, which *was* given

to me by Miss Osborne. I was surprised when I returned from Crackenbury to find you had gone, and I am sorry that if you wished to say good-bye to me, I should have been out on the day you left. It is very kind of you to say that I had anything to do with your having a pleasant visit at Kelvedon. I am sure I enjoyed the walks you were good enough to take with us very much, and 'Etta and 'Diny did so too. I hope we may meet again some day. Mrs. Osborne generally goes up to Town for a short time before Christmas.

“Truly yours,

“SYBIL MAINWARING.”

Sybil dared not say more, she could not say less; and agitated with the conflicting thoughts that the letter was too forward or too cold, she would have recalled it half-a-dozen times after it was safe on its way to London.

But she faithfully kept her second resolution, and never allowed the necessity of forgetting Humphrey Perceval to be absent from her mind.

CHAPTER XI.

HUMPHREY had gone straight back to London from Kelvedon, and was now on duty with his regiment. More to please his father than from any wish of his own he had gone much into society, but he found it insipid without Sybil, and time and absence seemed rather to increase than diminish his passion.

At length he resolved to speak to his father upon the subject, and so he told him all.

“ You will be as rich as anyone need want to be some day, my dear boy, and you may certainly please yourself in your choice of a wife, especially as you say she is a lady. A governess does not certainly sound well, if it

were only that you can have so little opportunity of really making her acquaintance before you marry her. The amount of intimacy which would be natural, and easily accomplished with a girl in your own station, would be scarcely possible with one in a dependent position."

"But you have no idea how much I saw of her at Kelvedon ; and as to station she is of quite as good family as we are."

Mr. Perceval did not much like the idea of Humphrey having seen so much of the young lady at Kelvedon ; he fancied a trap had been laid for his son by an artful and designing woman.

"How old is she ?" said he.

"About twenty, I should think."

"Pretty ?"

"Very pretty ! but quiet and simple in her dress and manners ; rather retiring, and, above all, a thorough lady."

Mr. Perceval was a little reassured.

“Would it not be as well to make inquiries about her people, especially about this brother you speak of? Have you looked them up in the ‘Landed Gentry?’”

“No!”

Humphrey would “look them up” at the club the next day, and make any further inquiries when he had done so.

The next morning Humphrey flew to the club and seized upon the book of names, which happened to be an edition a few years old, and turning over the pages rapidly until he came to ‘Mainwaring,’ read as follows:—

“MAINWARING, JAMES, Esq., only son of Thomas Mainwaring, Esq., of Northshire, who represented Northshire in Parliament, 1798—1810: born 1800, m. 1836 ADELA, only daughter of William Blackwood, Esq., of the city of London (she died 1843), and has issue:

“THOMAS, b. 1837, Cornet 4th Royal

Lancers ; Harold, b. 1839, Ensign 2nd Batt. 26th Regt. ; Sybil."

"Fourth Lancers," thought Humphrey. "Why, Pratt, whom I saw yesterday, used to be in the 4th. I must ask him. I wonder which is the one in America? Of course he must have left the army."

He turned to the "Army List" and found that both the 4th and the 2-26th were "serving in Bengal." The name of Harold Mainwaring appeared as senior ensign of the latter regiment. There was no Mainwaring in the 4th.

At that moment Captain Pratt entered the room. Humphrey turned.

"Ah, my dear fellow! the very man I was looking for."

"What, did you think you would find what part of Town I was in by looking in the 'Army List ?'" said the other, seeing the book in Humphrey's hand.

“No! but joking apart, did you know a fellow called Mainwaring, when you were in the 4th?”

Captain Pratt’s face immediately became serious enough.

“Mainwaring! should rather think I did. You don’t mean to say you’ve seen him”—said he hastily.

“Seen him, oh no; but I want to know something about him. The fact is—” and Humphrey stopped, not knowing quite what to say the fact was, and seeing Captain Pratt’s usually gay face become overcast.

“Well, I hope you have nothing to do with him and never will have, but as you ask me the question, I will only ask you in reply, do you really want to know?”

“I do,” said Humphrey, equally gravely.

“Well,” said the other, “He is a most infernal blackguard. He swindled some fellows in our regiment. The thing was

hushed up and he was allowed to sell ; almost a pity. Something about a bill. *Forgery !*" said Pratt, sinking his voice almost to a whisper. " His governor came up and paid everything, and the young fellow was shipped off to America——"

" To America ?" said Humphrey.

" On the understanding that he was to be let alone if he never returned. Now you know why I asked you if you had seen him."

" Oh, no ! I merely wanted to know because——"

Humphrey again hesitated.

" My dear fellow," said Pratt, " I do not the least want to know why you asked. Only now you know all I do. I believe the man has a brother—not a bad little fellow—in the 26th—went to India—best thing he could do. By the way, are you going out of town at Christmas ? "

And after a little commonplace conversation, Humphrey left the club.

He was much shocked. Could he marry the sister of a man who might be a *felon*! But after all it was not Sybil's fault. Indeed it was her misfortune, and she needed a protector and a sympathiser all the more. So long before Humphrey reached home he had made up his mind that he would have Sybil, in spite of the crimes of a whole regiment of brothers. But he thought his father might not be so easily convinced. Nor was he; but in the end he contented himself with preaching patience and formally gave his consent.

After all, a house without a woman was a very cheerless affair, and if Sybil was only half what Humphrey painted her, she would not only make Humphrey happy, but make a pleasant home for Mr. Perceval's declining years. There is a tinge of selfishness in our least selfish thoughts—in our most disinterested actions. If it be *L'amour, l'amour, l'amour, qui fait le monde à la ronde*, it is

Selfishness that prevents it going round too fast.

That night Humphrey sat down and wrote the following letter :—

“ MY DEAREST MISS MAINWARING,

“ I am only too sensible that the request I am about to make to you may seem somewhat sudden ; but believe me, it is only made after full and—to me—long consideration, and a determination that it is necessary at least for my own happiness—as I hope and pray it may be for yours—and the request is that you will consent to become my wife. I saw quite enough of you during that brief but happy week at Kelvedon to convince me that I could love no other than you, and time and absence have only strengthened that conviction. But kind as you always were to me upon that occasion, I cannot but fear that you may think you have not seen enough of me to know whether

I am worthy of you ; if this is so, I hope you will allow me in some way to become better known to you before you give your final answer. Above all, I implore you to let no false delicacy induce you to refuse my suit. I am writing this letter with the fullest consent of my father, and if I have means at present to support us both with comfort, and expectations of being able to do so at some future time with luxury, I hope you will not allow the accident of your having a smaller portion than usually falls to the lot of young ladies of your birth and connection, to interfere with—may I say your happiness, certainly with that of one who loves you as well as I do. The unfortunate story of your eldest brother I have heard. We need never refer to it : and I shall look forward to the pleasure of making the acquaintance of your younger brother on his return from India. You have nothing to do but telegraph in reply to me the one

word *Yes*. I shall be in a fever until I get your answer. I will provide for no other contingency, and remain

“Ever your truly loving
“HUMPHREY.”

This letter could not be posted till the next day, and Humphrey had two very sleepless nights. The day after, he was in a fidget from cock-crow, and expected a telegram before breakfast. Considering the letter would not be received by Miss Mainwaring until nine o'clock, and that she could not be expected to make up her mind in five minutes, and that it was three miles to the telegraph office, and that it was always difficult to get a messenger in so perfect an establishment as Kelvedon—where every one had exactly his own work to do, it seemed more likely that if Miss Mainwaring telegraphed at all, the message would scarcely arrive much before dinner-time. She might

not like to telegraph. She might not like to say "Yes" direct. Some ifs ; or she might not wish to telegraph "No." In fact dozens of things might happen to prevent her telegraphing.

All these, and many more which never could have happened, occupied Humphrey's brain the whole morning. He tried to read. His eyes rested on the type. He even turned over the leaves. Yet he did not take in a single word. The book might have been written in Spanish.

At every knock at the door, every ring at the bell, he jumped up and looked out. He had taken up his position at the dining-room window ; and no one who has not sat at the dining-room window of a house in a London street for four or five hours at a stretch can have any idea of the number of people who come to the door ; to say nothing of the thousand and one people and things which pass by, and attract the attention of

those who are watching like Humphrey. The butcher, the baker, the grocer, coals, beer, "the man about the gas," the green-grocer, the poult erer, "Bottles," "Hare-skins and rabbit-skins," half-a-dozen barrel-organs, a German band, a "man who calls with his little account," a friend of the butler, a man with lamp oil, books from the library, a foot-man, in powdered hair and a short round blue pilot-jacket and a pot hat, with a note, the fishmonger, two or three men distributing circulars, the postman with his sharp rat-tat, the policeman with his measured tread, a man from the tailor with some clothes for Humphrey—all these severally demanded the watcher's notice and attention by representing themselves to his highly strung nerves to be bearers of a telegram from his lady-love, until they showed themselves in their true and detestable colours to his disappointed mind. The suspense was rapidly becoming too much

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and read the telegram as carefully as if it had been in Greek, and was ten lines long ; but it was written in very plain English, and consisted of but one word, and that word was—"Yes" !

CHAPTER XII.

HUMPHREY's letter had been handed to Sybil at Kelvedon by the butler after prayers, but she did not open it until she was upstairs again in the schoolroom. She supposed it was an answer to her letter to him, and she wondered what he would say.

What he did say she had never for a moment anticipated, and she did not quite know whether to laugh or to cry after she had read it. Humphrey Perceval really loved her. Humphrey Perceval would make her his wife. She could not believe it. But there was no doubt that he was quite serious. And so nice, and kind, and

considerate a letter. And he knew all—her brother's disgrace, her own poverty, all ; and yet he, the brilliant young guardsman, who met all the beauties and heiresses in London, and was handsome enough, and nice enough, and clever enough to marry whom he pleased, had chosen her, the poor governess. She need not spend her time any more in forgetting him, and in making believe that she did not love him, and that he did not and could not possibly care about her.

And if she also thought just for a moment how pleasant it would be to have a home of her own again, and perhaps some day to be Lady Perceval, it was not that her love for Humphrey was one whit the less pure or less disinterested, or that she would have weighed these advantages in the balance for one moment against Humphrey himself, were he as poor as Job ; but it was that she was a woman after all, and not a fairy ; though indeed it is doubtful whether

even a poor fairy would object to be rich, or an attendant spirit scorn the titular honours of Fairyland.

But ought not a modest young lady, and especially a governess, to have hesitated?—to have said “No; impossible!” if only just for the sake of form and propriety—to have asked for time, and said she would think about it?—or to have said she could not conceive what Mr. Perceval meant, and gone off into hysterics? Perhaps so. But to tell the truth, it never occurred to Sybil to do anything of the sort.

She felt much more inclined to dance about the house, singing all the time, and so down to the station, to take the first train for London, and to rush forty miles an hour into her lover’s arms. A most immodest proceeding surely! What ideas for one who was intrusted with the bringing up of girls!

However, Sybil did not dance about the house, but after a very few moments’ con-

sideration she walked—if so gross a word can be used to express her mode of progress, feeling as if she were made of spiritualised india-rubber—to the drawing-room, where she knew she would find Mrs. Osborne. So inclined was she to be pleased with everybody and everything, so completely did the brimming over happiness in her own mind eliminate everything that was unlovely and unlovable from everything it contemplated, that Mrs. Osborne appeared to her, as she tripped along, to be a paragon of excellence and incarnation of all virtue and kindness, —as a sort of second mother, who had cherished her for so long a time, and to whom she should now hasten to communicate her joy.

As Sybil entered the room, Mrs. Osborne had just put down a cookery book, and looking somewhat stern in her spectacles, was turning over the leaves of Dr. Scowler's third treatise on Spiritual Mortification, and

wondering how Mrs. Jellycoe could possibly have been so stupid as to have let the stock of truffles get so low without giving her notice. She looked up coldly.

“Do you want to speak to me, Miss Mainwaring?”

“Yes, I have something to tell you—some good news,—at least, what I hope you will think good news. You have always been so kind to me, and I have been *so* happy all the time I have been at Kelvedon——”

“You don’t mean to say you are going to leave!”

“Well—yes—I am going—to be married!”

Mrs. Osborne took off her spectacles in order that she might open her eyes wider, and quite frightened Sybil by the way she stared at her.

“And I thought, as I have no mother, and feel, as it were, at home here, that I

would come and tell you first, before any-one else," said Sybil, while Mrs. Osborne was taking her breath, and wondering whom she could have met at Kelvedon—whether it was the head-gardener, or the village schoolmaster, or some old lover.

"Well, I'm sure I'm very sorry," began the lady of the house, "sorry to lose you. I hope you will be in no hurry to go. Of course I hope you'll be happy; but I don't think you are likely to have such a home as this. You are now accustomed to a mode of life which, perhaps, you may regret. I hope the young man is well off?"

"Yes, thank you," said Sybil, quietly, wondering now how she should break her news.

"Have you known him long? What's his name?"

"I'm afraid I've not known him very long, and his name is Perceval—Mr. Perceval who was staying here in August."

If the tiger skin which lay before the fireplace had got up and wagged its tail, Mrs. Osborne could not have looked more astonished, as she burst forth—

“Mr. Perceval! What! you do not mean to say that . . .” and surprise and rage absolutely choked her utterance.

Sybil was positively frightened.

“But how? . . .”

“He has written to me this morning asking me to marry him.”

“Good Heavens!” ejaculated Mrs. Osborne, piously. “And you have accepted him?”

“I mean to do so,” said Sybil, quietly. “I hope you do not see anything wrong in it. I thought you would be glad to hear.”

“Done wrong!—glad to hear!” shrieked Mrs. Osborne. “Done wrong to carry on an intrigue with one of your mistress’s guests under her very roof, to take advan-

tage of your position, and of the confidence which was reposed in you, to inveigle a young man who might have married one of the daughters of the house, into a *mésalliance* with yourself?—done wrong to corrupt my dear girls' minds with your artful practices, and to deceive me with your soft, hypocritical ways? Done wrong, indeed!"

"Mrs. Osborne," Sybil began.

"Glad to hear, indeed!" interrupted Mrs. Osborne; "glad to hear that you have caught a young guardsman and——" the very thought becoming too much for Mrs. Osborne, she laughed hysterically as she said, "the heir to a baronetcy; you, with a brother in jail, and who might have been in the workhouse yourself, or worse, if I had not taken you without a character, without any character, and treated you here in a way that few governesses were ever treated? This is your gratitude!"

Sybil was standing all this time as much astonished at the first outburst as Mrs. Osborne had been at her own news, and waiting for an opportunity of getting a word in. At last she did.

“I don’t know what to say. I don’t know how I can have offended you. I think I had better go away until we both are calmer.”

“Calmer!” burst forth Mrs. Osborne, “what do you mean by calmer? It would be wicked, positively wicked, in me to be calm after what I have heard. Have you never heard of righteous indignation? Never will I spare the wicked,” said the good lady, as though she were a sort of destroying angel (unattached), “or allow sin in my house to go unchastised, as long I can lift up my feeble voice,” and here Mrs. Osborne screamed louder than ever, “in defence of what is right.”

Sybil was rapidly debating in her own

mind, by this time, whether she should take up the nearest book—which happened to be “Scowler on Spiritual Mortification”—and throw it at Mrs. Osborne, or whether she should attack her with that still more deadly weapon, the tongue; but she finally decided to do neither, and, making a low curtsey, just a little lower, I fear, than was necessary or warranted by the most perfect Christian charity,—walked out of the room, Mrs. Osborne being, as the Parliamentary reporters say when Mr. Biggar is on his legs at three o'clock in the morning, “left speaking.”

Sybil went at once to her room, feeling choking and sick at heart, and walked along the passages as though leaden clogs were tied to her feet. She was at a loss at once to understand the full import of Mrs. Osborne’s rage, but her mind was clearly made up as to what she ought to do. First of all by way of cheering and strengthen-

ing herself, she sat down and indited the telegram which we have already seen, and rang the bell. The schoolroom maid appeared.

“Will you ask Mr. Strangeways if any one is going into Hornby this morning, and if so, to be good enough to send this telegram?”—she had enclosed it in an envelope, directed to the telegraph clerk,—“here is the money.”

“Yes, Miss.”

She then sat down and wrote the following letter.

“DEAR MRS. OSBORNE,

“Although I am at a loss to understand the meaning of your reception of me this morning, I am sure it would be pleasanter for both of us, after what has passed, that I should leave the house as soon as possible, as my continuance here would only be disagreeable to you, and painful to myself.

I therefore, as a last favour, beg your permission to leave this afternoon.

“ Faithfully yours,

“ SYBIL MAINWARING.”

This note, duly folded and addressed, was delivered to Mrs. Osborne in her husband's study.

As Sybil had left the drawing-room, Mrs. Osborne's rage had grown more violent than ever, and as she could not go on talking in the absence of the offender, she actually panted and foamed for want of an outlet. She was indignant with Sybil, of course, for her share in the transaction, but she was also indignant with Humphrey for neglecting her daughter and carrying away her governess, with Henrietta for allowing herself to be slighted, with 'Diny for not looking more sharply after Miss Mainwaring, with her husband for not looking more sharply after Humphrey, and worst and bitterest indigna-

tion of all, she was indignant with herself, first, for allowing such a scandal to take place in her house—under her very nose, secondly, for having so far forgotten herself as to give way before a governess, and show to one, who was now a successful enemy, the full extent and bitterness of her success. Finally, she was decidedly indignant with Providence—which ought really to have managed things a little more considerately for the pious mistress of Kelvedon Hall. If she had required humbling, as *we all do* need it, Providence might have managed the thing in a quieter way, and not caused her to lose 'Diny's governess and Henrietta's *bon parti* and her own temper all at once; and, above all, that artful little minx Miss Mainwaring should never have been allowed to have things so completely her own way. There was clearly something wrong. Providence was napping. And Mrs. Osborne, feeling a little calmer, thought she would "go and see

what her husband thought about it," a euphemistic expression common to married ladies, signifying that they will impart their own very decided ideas upon the subject to the partner of their joys—and sorrows.

Mr. Osborne was much too sensible a man to have views of his own about governesses, and though he did not quite see the enormity of the offence committed, he said, "Yes," "Certainly," "Ah, really," in the course of his wife's story, to such an extent as to enable her to say to herself, and if necessary to other people, that "Mr. Osborne was even more shocked than she was, and entirely agreed with all her views on the subject."

"She must go at once," said the lady.

"Oh, of course."

"I will write to her now, for I do not want to see her again."

"By all means."

"You must let me have a cheque for her wages.'

“Certainly.”

So Mrs. Osborne sat down there and then, and wrote as follows :—

“Mrs. Osborne is of opinion that Miss Mainwaring’s conduct leaves her *no option* in the matter but that of requesting that she will *at once* leave the house. A carriage will be in readiness to convey her to the *four o’clock* train to London, where Mrs. Osborne presumes she will go ! Until she starts, Mrs. Osborne begs that she will hold no communication with her daughters, nor does she wish to see her again herself. The enclosed cheque will satisfy all that is due to Miss Mainwaring for her *services* at Kelvedon. Mrs. Osborne feels it *quite unnecessary*, but perhaps right, to say that Mr. Osborne entirely concurs with Mrs. Osborne, both as to the nature of Miss Mainwaring’s conduct, and the *necessity* of her immediately leaving Kelvedon.”

Mr. Osborne had read over this composi-

tion, and was engaged in writing out a cheque for the amount due, when the butler came in and handed to Mrs. Osborne Sybil's own letter. "Like her impudence," she ejaculated, when she had read it. "Pleasanter for both of us that we should part as soon as possible." "Both of us indeed! I have a great mind to say she shall not go until the end of her quarter. We can insist upon a quarter's notice, can't we, John?"

"No, my dear, only a month."

"Well, no matter: a month. But shall we send our letter?—No—Yes, stay I think so—Yes! Send it at once, and then we shall not be obliged to *answer* her at all!" Mr. Osborne hurriedly signed the cheque, and the missive was duly enveloped and dispatched by Mr. Strangeways, resummoned for the purpose. 'Diny and 'Etta were in the schoolroom with Sybil when it was delivered to her, hearing with amazed faces that she was going to leave Kelvedon.

On reading Mrs. Osborne's letter, she said quietly; "My darling girls, your mother wishes me to leave the house at once, and not to see you again before I go. I am sure she judges me harshly, and some day she will think better of it; however, as long as I am in her house, I must obey her orders, and, as far as I can, see that you do so too; so come, give me a kiss, and let me run upstairs and pack, and let us hope we may meet again soon. Don't cry," said Sybil, her own eyes bursting with big tears, "I shall soon be very happy, I hope. I am going to be married to Mr. Perceval."

The girls sprang into her arms.

"Oh, my darling Mannie, I am sure you will be happy wherever you go, but we shall be so miserable without you. What does mamma mean?"

"Come my darlings, you must go."

She had barely disengaged herself from

their embrace, when Mr. Strangeways entered with the message, “Mrs. Osborne wishes to see Miss Osborne and Miss Geraldine at once.”

They tore themselves away weeping, and Sybil, who had far too much to do to permit herself the luxury of a good cry, went up to her room, and busied herself in packing up her clothes and her few little household gods. In less than two hours all was ready, and she ate a solitary mouthful of luncheon, brought up by the gaping, wondering schoolroom maid.

The Servants’ hall was still in ignorance of the state of affairs; but the Housekeeper’s room discussed nothing else during dinner. At the conclusion of that select meal, Mr. Strangeways ordered the usher to bring down Miss Mainwaring’s boxes, and the interest became general; the schoolroom maid immediately repairing to Sybil’s room to know “if she wanted anything?”; but

the interest culminated in absolute excitement, when it was announced that a carriage had been ordered to take Miss Mainwaring and her luggage to the station. Then everybody felt that they were living in exciting times, and the coachman, who on receiving the order had at first hesitated to believe it, had, when solemnly reassured as to its correctness by Mr. Strangeways, declared that "he had never heard of such a think, no, not since he had been at Kelvedon!" As the coachman, however, did not actually refuse to perform the duty, Sybil was duly driven to the station, and having taken her ticket, found herself at four o'clock on the most eventful day of her life, seated in the up-express to London.

The news of her sudden departure spread rapidly through the house, and then into the village, and among the neighbouring squires' houses; and the day but one after,

a kind neighbour called on Mrs. Osborne to condole.

But Mrs. Osborne astonished her. That excellent lady considered the wisdom of the serpent quite as necessary for a truly Christian woman as the harmlessness of the dove, and thinking it highly incumbent upon one "called" like herself to fill so eminent a position in this world, not to give occasion to the enemies of godliness to blaspheme, had carefully considered what attitude it would be best to adopt towards society with regard to Sybil's marriage and abrupt departure. There are very few greater or more saintly social pleasures than that of turning the tables upon a would-be sympathizer, and Mrs. Horner found the mistress of Kelvedon quite ready for her, ready loaded and shotted in fact, and only waiting to be fired. And poor stupid Mrs. Horner pulled the string ; and poking her nose into the muzzle, like the monkey in the story, to

see the explosion, was blown to pieces by the discharge.

“I’m so sorry to hear of the trouble you’ve had lately,” said she, in the sweetest of voices.

“You’re very kind, but it’s of no great moment. They were very valuable it’s true, but we can easily replace them.”

“What?” said Mrs. Horner, quite thrown off her guard.

“Why, I thought you were alluding to those Australian cygnets that were stolen off the lake : the head-keeper thinks it was one of your men ; and that’s why I thought you spoke of it ; but it’s not the least matter.”

“Oh, I never heard about the cygnets ; and I’m sure it couldn’t have been either, that is to say any, of our men ; I was thinking of your trouble about Miss Mainwaring,” said Mrs. Horner, returning to the charge.

“Oh ! you are very kind to call it trouble. Of course we were rather distressed to lose

her. It is so difficult to get a perfect lady for a governess, and I could not think of having any one else for my girls."

"Oh, of course not," said Mrs. Horner, whose father had kept a grocer's shop in Bristol, and who had been married for her money by a poor squire in the neighbourhood.

"Indeed, it is so difficult to find perfect ladies anywhere now," said Mrs. Osborne, determined not to spare her antagonist; "society is getting so mixed."

"Dreadfully mixed," said Mrs. Horner, shaking her head in the great sadness, and possibly thinking of her father's sugar.

There was a slight pause, when poor Mrs. Horner said once more with a sort of gulp, "So you like the match?"

"Oh yes! it is not exactly the kind of match I should wish for my own daughter you know, but he is a very pleasant young man, and very well connected. In the

Guards, I think, and pretty well off. He will not be able to keep his wife in quite the same style as she has been accustomed to here, but of course one could not expect that ; and he has very good expectations. Indeed I believe he is heir presumptive to a baronetcy. But only heir presumptive, you know," she added apologetically, as if a Kelvedon governess had a right to a full-blown baronet at the very least ; and that it was on the whole rather a piece of condescension on Sybil's part to leave such a home as Kelvedon for a mere Guardsman with expectations.

The ungodly, it is true, may sometimes flourish like a green bay tree ; but it is a source of true joy to a pious soul to see them cut down, dried up, and withered. And such a holy joy filled good Mrs. Osborne's breast as Mrs. Horner rose to take her leave that day ; and she herself, with the sweetest smile, hoping she was not tired

with having walked so far, rang the bell to summon Mr. Strangeways and two tall footmen to open the hall door, and stand solemnly at attention to stare at Mrs. Horner as she tucked up her skirts in the porch.

CHAPTER XIII.

SYBIL's way to London lay or rather ran through Rugby ; and the train, after leaving that important station, accelerated its pace, and went smoothly bowling along towards the metropolis at the rate of five-and-forty or fifty miles an hour. Her spirits rose as she got farther and farther from Kelvedon, and nearer and nearer London, and though she did not know what she would do, or how she would do it, or even where she would go when she arrived, she knew that Humphrey was there—Humphrey who loved her, and had a right to be her protector, and she felt perfectly

happy. And there was something exhilarating in the very motion of the train, spinning along so smoothly and so swiftly through the crisp evening air: shooting under bridges with a short roar, and rushing through the well-lighted stations with a flash and a rattle and a shriek, now deep in the bowels of the earth under Edge Hill, or going on its easy way through Tring cutting, and seeming to quicken its pace defiantly as it dashed through big stations like Wolverton or Bletchley.

On, on it flies, stopping nowhere, never looking back, smooth as a serpent, powerful as a drove of wild oxen, licking up huge draughts of water with its iron tongue as it sped along its iron way. On, on, without a Present, rushing away, like Life, from its Past to its Future, inexorable as Fate, triumphing over Nature, annihilating space, laughing at distance, never seeming to slacken speed, but always to go faster—faster; now rocking

for a moment from side to side like a beaten horse at the finish of a hard race, anon settling down as it were, and shooting forward swifter than ever, and as smoothly as a kestrel in its swoop. And Sybill's pulse beat quicker in sympathy with the motion, and her spirits rose higher and higher. She had made up her mind what to do. We make up our minds quicker when we are going along at fifty miles an hour, than when we are sauntering along at three. She could not go to Queen Street. Of course not. She did not like to go to Cambridge Crescent without giving Mrs. Pevensie some notice, especially at ten o'clock at night. She would go to the Station Hotel, write to Mrs. Pevensie and Humphrey, and do whatever they thought best the next day. She was too much excited to think very calmly what that best would be. Excited, indeed, no wonder. What a day! what events! what changes! At nine o'clock that very morning she had

been a quiet governess in a quiet family, and without prospects of any sort. Within twelve hours she had been proposed to by Humphrey, insulted and discharged by Mrs. Osborne, driven to the station in one of Mr. Osborne's carriages ; and here she was an engaged young lady, alone in a first-class carriage at nine o'clock at night, following up the briefest and most important telegram she had ever sent in her life, dashing across England at the rate of fifty miles an hour. What cared she that she was alone. Was not Humphrey there ? What cared she that she was unexpected ? Was not Humphrey ready for her ? A roar and a rattle. Sybil stared out of the window. King's Langley ! A flash and a rattle, and King's Langley was reckoned with the past, and so on to Watford ; until Watford too was gone like a phantom ; and so with Bushey, and Pinner, and Harrow, and Sudbury ; and then, as in a lull, the train drew up at Willesden. Scarcely

giving itself time to breathe however, it started again and after burrowing under Primrose Hill and rattling through the land of iron girders, and shooting through the land of warehouses, the long train wriggled like a great serpent into Euston Square Station, the land of running porters and entangled cabs.

“Keb, Miss?” said Corduroy on the carriage step.

“No, thank you,” said Sybil, “I want to go to the hotel.”

“O-o-ote-el,” cried Corduroy turning abruptly; and before the train had quite stopped, Boots in a scarlet jacket came up.

“Otel, Miss?”

“Yes.”

“Any luggage?”

“Yes, two boxes and a bag in the van.”

“Where from?”

“From Hornby.”

“All right.”

In a few minutes Sybil, waiting in the ladies' coffee room for the supper she did not want, but felt she ought to eat, wrote the following letters:—

“EUSTON STATION HOTEL,
“10 o'clock, Thursday night.

“I have just arrived in London. I have not time or space to say why. Come and see me here as soon as you get this, and you shall know all; but all is nothing in comparison with your love and that I am ever
your own

“SYBIL.”

“EUSTON STATION HOTEL,
“10 o'clock, Thursday night.

“MY DEAR MRS. PEVENSEY,

“You will be surprised to see the address on this letter: but I can not explain to you more at present than that I have been forced to leave Kelvedon, and that I have this moment arrived here by train.

Will you allow me to come and stay with you, if only for a few days, when I will explain all, and tell you some good news as well. I hope Mr. Pevensey is quite well. Pray excuse such a short note.

“Your affectionate

“SYBIL MAINWARING.”

These duly folded and posted, and the supper played with rather than eaten, Sybil retired to her room, to lie awake till five o'clock in the morning, and jump out of bed about six, with the sensation of having overslept herself, and feeling certain that Humphrey was waiting for her downstairs. As she had forgotten to wind up her watch the night before, she could not be sure of the time, and dressing in spite of the darkness of the December morning, she had to spend two weary hours waiting and wondering at what o'clock Humphrey would get her letter, and what he would think of it. But

how would he find her when he did come? She had not thought of that. So she went very timidly up to the “young lady” at the bar and said: “I think a gentleman will call for me some time this morning.”

The “young lady” directed at Sybil a look of mingled scorn and reproach, when Sybil happily added, “and a lady too. If they ask for Miss Mainwaring, will you kindly show them in to me.”

“Very well.”

About ten o’clock—some twenty minutes after Sybil’s letter had been put into his hands at Queen Street, Mayfair,—Humphrey appeared, and walked through the hall into the ladies’ coffee-room, where Sybil was awaiting him. He walked quickly up to her, and with difficulty contented himself with a shake of the hand, which was warm enough to arouse the suspicions of the waiter. The position was clearly a delicate one; it would not have done to order a private room, so

Humphrey sat down to breakfast with Sybil at a retired table, and learnt all she had to tell.

His indignation at Mrs. Osborne's conduct was considerably diminished by his joy at having Sybil actually before him, but happy as he was, he was much perplexed as to how to act. He knew the world quite well enough to be aware of the importance of acting with the utmost discretion, and that a single false step might endanger his wife's fair fame for ever. He heard with pleasure of Sybil's letter to Mrs. Pevensey, and decided himself to call on that lady, and probably on her husband, at once. No time was to be lost. Sybil was scarcely equally aware of the necessity of prompt and discreet action, and rather pouted as Humphrey left her—alone in the big hotel, without even saying when he would return.

He drove at once to Queen Street, Mayfair, and was greatly relieved to find that his father had not yet gone out. He soon told

him the state of affairs, and they set off together in a cab to Cambridge Crescent. Mr. Pevensey was in the City. Mrs. Pevensey was at home. She had written to Sybil to say that she might call, and if her reasons for leaving Kelvedon were satisfactory, she might come and stay at Cambridge Crescent until she could get another place. Humphrey sent in his card, introduced himself as the future husband of Sybil, presented his father, and explained in a few words Sybil's abrupt departure from Kelvedon, and her arrival at Euston Square. Mrs. Pevensey received the intelligence coldly, and said she could do nothing until she had consulted Mr. Pevensey.

Would she favour them with Mr. Pevensey's address,—In the City? Yes, she had no objection, Number 47, St. Mary Axe. Humphrey would call. He might do as he liked. Would she not go and see Sybil? No, she thought not, Sybil might

come and see her if she chose. She did not care about calling on stray young ladies at strange hotels.

Sick at heart, Humphrey left the house with his father, and entering the cab again drove to St. Mary Axe. Mr. Pevensey received them stiffly. He thought Sybil's conduct imprudent, "as a man of business, most imprudent." He was not sure he ought to countenance it. He had not the honour of Mr. Perceval's acquaintance. Coldstream Guards. Wished to know how much he had a year. Any debts? Humphrey swallowed his disgust, seeing how much lay in this man's power, and finally, well-seconded by his father, obtained what he wanted, a letter written to Sybil asking her to come and stay at his house—"in the West End"—for a few days. But even this precious document he would not entrust to Humphrey, but ostentatiously sent to the post by one of his clerks before his eyes.

Humphrey finally asked permission to call at Cambridge Crescent, which was granted—for the next day! Humphrey immediately drove to Euston Square, and told Sybil all that he had done, and introduced his father, who ordered luncheon in a private room for the whole party.

Mr. Pevensey's letter arrived in the afternoon, and Sybil at once set out for Cambridge Crescent, consoled by Humphrey's assurance that all was now in a fair way to be speedily and satisfactorily settled, and that he hoped to be able to have good news for her on the morrow, when he would call by permission of Mr. Pevensey.

Mr. Perceval and his son had a long and anxious conversation that evening, which lasted far into the night, but before they retired to rest they had finally settled—First, that Humphrey and Sybil had better be married as soon as possible. Secondly, that as settlements would cause delay, and as

Sybil had nothing to settle, they might as well be married without the intervention of the lawyers, and that Humphrey had better immediately apply for two months' leave, get a marriage licence, and leave it to Sybil to say what her views were about a trousseau, see if Mrs. Pevensey would allow her to be married from her house, consult her as to any necessary arrangements connected therewith, and beg her and Sybil to agree upon an early day for the ceremony.

Not to offend Mrs. Pevensey by a too early call next day, Humphrey went and procured the licence before going to Cambridge Crescent; but inasmuch as Mrs. Pevensey refused to leave him and Sybil alone together, he could only show it to her and deliver himself of all his questions and suggestions in a most business-like way. However, Mrs. Pevensey, though intensely jealous of poor Sybil, and angry with her for being so happy as well as for giving her so much trouble,

had no wish to keep her longer than was necessary ; so she made no objection to the earliest possible day being fixed for the marriage ; and Sybil felt sure she could get all the clothes she actually wanted in a few days, provided that the said clothes were not to be called a trousseau. Finally that day week was fixed upon for the marriage. Breakfast was to be dispensed with, and they were to start for Paris, via Queen Street, Mayfair, immediately after the ceremony.

Mrs. Pevensley was a tall angular woman, with iron-grey hair and an iron-grey dress, a long iron-grey face, a sharp iron-grey nose with a red tip, a cold hand encased in black mittens, bony fingers with coarse red tips, iron-grey nails, and an acidulated expression of dissatisfied resignation. She had been a city heiress, and John Pevensley, who was a first cousin of Sybil's mother, had married her for her money, and had never professed to care much about her. When

they had been some five or six years married, and had had no children, Mrs. Pevensey's father failed for a large amount, and her entire fortune, which had remained in the business, was swallowed up by the creditors. This accident scarcely tended to increase Mr. Pevensey's affection for his spouse; and devoting himself more than ever to his business to make up for all that was lost, he devoted himself if possible less than ever to his wife. "A good man of business," hard, and growing harder every day, he scarcely felt the want of affection at home; and he certainly sought no solace in the iron-grey bosom of the lady who bore his name. Indeed he dined out in the City and elsewhere nearly every night, and though he had nothing genial about him, he enjoyed life in his hard way, and thought as little as possible about his wife in Cambridge Crescent. Some of his friends, indeed, affirmed that he thought more about a snug little

cottage at Highgate, where a lady who did not bear his name, and who was anything but iron-grey in her general appearance, received his visits with great appearance of pleasure ; but others, doubting the accuracy of the information, contended that John Pevensey had not a spark of the tender in his composition, and maintained that if he had anywhere such an establishment as was hinted at, he carried the affair on quite as a matter of business.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Mainwaring had ever felt particularly attracted towards their hard city cousin, still less towards his amiable “lady,” so that even when Sybil was suddenly thrown upon the world at her father’s death, the Pevenseys had not been by any means pleased at having to take her in ; and when they had dispatched her to Mrs. Osborne’s, they considered they had more than performed their duty as relations, and speedily forgot her existence. To be so

rudely roused from their obliviousness was exceedingly disagreeable to them both.

To Mr. Pevensey the idea of giving up a good place with most unbusiness-like suddenness, in order to marry a young officer of whom they knew nothing, was absolute madness. Mr. Pevensey's notion of young officers in general was that of wild and decidedly impecunious persons, and Humphrey's conduct in "running away with a governess," as he expressed it, gave him a very poor idea of his common sense, and led him to imagine that he should find him at his office at an early day soliciting a loan of money.

Having first made up his mind to refuse any such application, Mr. Pevensey thought the safest line of conduct was to oppose the marriage *in toto*, and wash his hands of the whole affair. Sybil might of course marry whom she chose, but he would have nothing whatever to do with it. In these good reso-

lutions he was for once sympathetically seconded by his wife, who was highly indignant at Sybil having presumed to leave her "situation," and to "receive the addresses" of any young man, without first consulting her, and jealous of her young lover, and envious of the happiness which might be in store for her,—the runaway governess—and which she, the great city heiress, had never hoped and could never hope to attain. Then the suddenness of the whole thing fussed and irritated her. She liked things done coldly and deliberately, and the very idea of having anyone in the same house with her who was both hurried and happy absolutely worried her.

So it came to pass that Mr. and Mrs. Pevensey would not go to the wedding, nor have a breakfast, nor would her cousin give Sybil away at church; and that Sybil was not allowed even to see Humphrey Perceval, but was sent out by herself to purchase her

own trousseau. Her family fortune of £100, which she had not touched, together with what she had saved out of her own earnings at Kelvedon, abundantly sufficed for her modest outfit. It was a source of great joy to her that she was not compelled to ask Mr. Pevensley for assistance. He would certainly have given her none. But it was also a source of joy to find, that in answer to Humphrey's delicately-worded suggestion that he should be allowed to make her a "wedding present" of a complete trousseau, she was able to say that she had enough money of her very own to provide all that was necessary ; whereupon Humphrey sent her a ruby and diamond ring, which had cost him more than all she possessed in the world.

In default of meeting, the young lovers wrote to each other half-a-dozen times a day, until Mrs. Pevensley, who fired up at every postman's knock, began to regret that she

had not prohibited all correspondence, or restricted the lovers to one letter a day.

Few girls about to marry the man they love have perhaps ever spent the week before their marriage less happily than Sybil. She could not "shop" all day long; and when she was in the house, Mrs. Pevensie liked her to sit in the room with her, partly in order that she might not write to Humphrey, and partly that she might assure herself by ocular demonstration that she was not unbecomingly happy for a young person who had behaved so badly. And then Sunday. Every week contains a Sunday: so did this. And what a day it was! But it passed like other days, though Sybil felt at the close that a few more such days would leave her as iron-grey as Mrs. Pevensie herself. Mr. Pevensie came down late, in slippers, dawdled over his breakfast, and yawned over a Sunday paper. Mrs. Pevensie, in

iron-grey silk, went to a dissenting chapel, to which she insisted upon Sybil accompanying her, and where they heard a long and decidedly gloomy discourse on the hopeless and worthless condition of mankind in general. Parts of the sermon were considered by Mrs. Pevensey to be so peculiarly applicable to Sybil that she nudged her repeatedly during its delivery, and took occasion to “nag” at her during the rest of the day. On their return they found that Mr. Pevensey had gone out, leaving a brief note to say he had been offered a bed at the house of a friend in the suburbs, and would not return until the following day. At length Tuesday arrived. The various articles composing Sybil’s trousseau had been sent home, packed up in boxes, and dispatched to Queen Street, Mayfair; and at ten o’clock on the morning of the eventful day, Charles Perceval appeared at the door of the house in

Cambridge Crescent, and carried off his future daughter-in-law to church. Mr. Pevensey had left the house for the City. Mrs. Pevensey gave her cousin a cold kiss, and said she “hoped she would be happy” in a tone of voice which might have withered the orange-blossoms in Sybil’s bonnet ; and the bridal party—consisting of the bride and her future father-in-law—drove off to church.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUMPHREY PERCEVAL had not spent by any means a pleasant week. He had no trousseau to choose : he had more clothes already than he knew what to do with. He had no settlements to look after, the great business of the conventional male lover as the wedding-day draws near. He could not go and see Sybil. Even writing to her half-a-dozen times a day consumed but a limited amount of time. He had got his leave, and so he had no military duties to occupy him ; and he did not care to appear much at the Club, or go much into general society ; for it seemed deceitful to say nothing about his

approaching marriage ; and he did not want to say anything about it until it was over. Indeed he did not quite know how to put it. It was not by any means an ordinary situation ; and the conventional English mind is slow to grasp extraordinary social situations, and still slower to forgive them. When Humphrey was once married, the world might accept the fact,—the married state being an institution conventionally recognised by society—and might possibly not trouble itself very much to enquire how it had been accomplished.

But that a young guardsman with good expectations was about to marry a governess who was almost disowned by her own relations, and that he should be about to commit this “rash act” without the assistance of bridesmaids or the spreading of a wedding breakfast—this was clearly more than Society could stand ; and Humphrey, who needed neither Society’s leave nor Society’s presence,

prudently held his tongue. He had dined out on the evening of Sybil's arrival, and had been in such preposterous spirits, bursting with excitement for which he had no explanation to offer, that the young lady whom he took down to dinner made up her mind about the second *entrée* that he was the most agreeable man she had ever met ; decided before the ice pudding that he would propose to her the next morning, and was convinced, as the hostess grinned at the epergne in the direction of her most exalted female guest, that he had had just a little too much champagne.

But the rest of the week Humphrey had spent chiefly at home in Queen Street, Mayfair, and he had more than sufficient time and opportunity for reflecting that he was about to take a step of very doubtful wisdom. Worldly wisdom of course ; for his love for Sybil never wavered. His father did not censure ; but he could easily

see that he did not completely approve. He “made the best of it” in a way that distressed Humphrey, who was touched by his generosity, and well nigh convinced of his wisdom.

Would not it have been a pleasanter thing for everybody if he were going to marry a girl in his own position, her father and mother more than ready to welcome Humphrey in his daily visits to their daughter, and making elaborate arrangements for bridesmaids and wedding breakfast, and quarrelling with his father about settlements, and sending paragraphs to the *Morning Post*, and all the rest of it. Sybil was of course a perfect lady : but she had neither connections nor fortune—her connections indeed were disreputable. All these thoughts crowded into the mind of Humphrey, condemned to absence from Sybil, from his duties, and from Society. Truly it is no wonder that the minds of monks and

friars should be such ready ground for the devil's seed.

But Humphrey's true and generous nature could not long harbour any such unworthy thoughts.

One duty, however, had to be performed before the wedding, and that was to write to Sir Walter. Like many other duties, it was by no means a pleasant task. Humphrey rarely wrote to his uncle, who disliked both the writing and reading of letters; and he had not been at Shipton since his visit to Kelvedon. If he had, he certainly would not have made a confidant of his uncle as to anything that had passed between himself and Sybil.

Sir Walter was an eminently unsympathetic character; and would have been sure—Humphrey knew—to take the common sense view of such matters. And this was exactly what made it so difficult to write to him on the subject. Indeed,

Humphrey found the letter so difficult to write, that he more than once thought of running down to Shipton to break the news to his uncle face to face. But he did not like to leave London when Sybil was there, even though he was not allowed to see her ; so he had to compose a letter, which was an undeniably feeble production, but which he finally sent,—not that he thought it by any means good, but that he felt sure he could not write a better. Its chief merit was that it did not say much.

Charles Perceval wrote to his brother at the same time, and two days after he received the reply :

“ MY DEAR CHARLIE,

“ I am sorry Humphrey has made a fool of himself. I can do nothing as regards settlements.

“ Yours affectionately,

“ WALTER PERCEVAL.”

The same post brought the following letter for Humphrey :

“ MY DEAR HUMPHREY,

“ I am sorry you did not consult me before you made up your mind to marry. I might have given you some good advice. But I hope you will be happy in your own way. I enclose a cheque for a wedding present for your intended. I hope to see you and your wife whenever you like to come to Shipton.

“ Your affectionate uncle,

“ WALTER PERCEVAL.”

The cheque was for £100.

The letter was a cold one, but there was nothing unkind to lay hold of; and Humphrey wrote to thank his uncle for his handsome present and kind invitation, and to say how much he looked forward to introducing

his wife to him. To this Sir Walter made no reply.

Humphrey had long and repeated conversations with his father. They both avoided the subject of Shipton ; they discussed at great length what was to be done relative to the marriage, in the immediate and remote future ; and finally decided that no change should be made in the establishment at Queen Street, Mayfair ; that Sybil should take her place as mistress of the house, and that the father, and son, and daughter-in-law should live together as the father, and mother, and son had lived before. Nothing could be simpler. Nor was there any great difficulty about money matters. Mr. Perceval would pay over to Sybil the interest of his own wife's fortune. Humphrey's allowance would be continued just as of old ; and the entire household expenses would be defrayed as before, save that the money would pass through the hands of Sybil instead of those

of Mrs. Smith the housekeeper, whose services would probably be dispensed with.

As to the wedding itself, it was decided, after mature consideration by father and son, that it should be as private as possible ; that as there was to be no wedding breakfast at Cambridge Crescent, there had better be none at Queen Street, Mayfair, and that as there would be no bridesmaids, there need be no best man, and that as there would be no breakfast and no bridesmaids, there need be no invited guests ; and last and most dreadful conclusion of all, that, as there would be nobody at all to see Sybil, she need not appear in a veil and a white silk dress with a wreath of orange blossoms, but in a simple morning dress.

And so it came to pass that when Sybil stepped into Mr. Perceval's carriage on that eventful Tuesday morning, she was attired in a pearl grey silk dress, and a bonnet to match of bright silvery satin and soft white

lace, and just like any other bewitching little bonnet, save that there nestled among the delicate folds a few sprigs of orange blossom! And truly, although, in spite of her little tribute to female propriety, Sybil may not have looked like a bride, she looked one of the brightest and freshest and most charming specimens of womankind that ever went to Church, to tell a man before God and God's minister, that she loved him better than anything else in the world. And as she stepped out of the carriage at the Church porch, and leaned fondly on the arm of Humphrey, who was waiting to receive her, surely "no sun upon an Easter Day was half so fine a sight," and even that naughty old Sir John Suckling, who was no bad judge of such matters, never saw or imagined any thing half so bewitching. And she walked up the aisle and knelt at the altar, and said *I will*, as she had so shortly before written *Yes*, without

hesitation, but with just as much modesty as though her fair head had been crowned with a wreath, and her bright eyes veiled with point-lace. And when the ceremony was over, and they had all signed the book, and she had given her *husband* and her father-in-law an unaffected kiss, the old clerk who had at first been considerably scandalised by her irregular get-up, came to the conclusion that Humphrey had not made such a bad choice after all! And indeed the old clerk was quite right.

CHAPTER XV.

IN a large room in a small house in the Fort of Jellalabadpore, on a couch or sofa made of strong Indian matting, and clad only in a silk shirt and a pair of cotton *pyjamas*, lay Lieutenant Harold Mainwaring of the 2nd battalion of Her Majesty's 26th Light Infantry, smoking a cheroot. It was the beginning of the month of March, and the weather was already tolerably hot ; and the young officer was debating with himself whether he should have the punkahs hung in his room at once, or wait a few days more before thus formally acknowledging the arrival of the hot

weather. In England we are accustomed to consider that the seasons are four—Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter; but this is purely a western myth, inasmuch as in India there are only three: the hot weather, the cold weather, and the rains. The cold weather was just over at Jellalabadpore; the hot weather, with its attendant punkahs and white clothes, was just setting in; and for the next four or five months the temperature of the unmoistened air would become, day by day, more and more like that of a furnace, until the rains came in with storms of thunder and lightning, and deluges of water from the clouds brought back life and vegetation to the burnt-up fields.

Now as it is decidedly imprudent to leave the house, except in a covered carriage, between a more or less early hour in the morning and a more or less late hour in the afternoon, during the entire course of

the hot weather, its arrival is greeted with no kindly welcome by young officers, who having no military duties after seven o'clock in the morning, and who, being neither very fond of reading nor able to discover any great amount of resource within the walls of an Indian bungalow, find the long days, when they are completely debarred from field sports, or even the gentlest out-door exercise or amusement, hanging intolerably heavy upon their hands.

Lieutenant Mainwaring was in a peculiarly unpleasant position, inasmuch as he was the only officer in the Fort at Jellalabadpore, where he occupied the proud, but solitary and eminently dull position of commander of the detachment of "Queen's troops" which formed the garrison.

The fort, too, was not only the hottest and dustiest place for miles round, but it was separated from the civil station by two miles of the hottest and dustiest road that

it is possible to conceive: a road, moreover, crowded both by day and night by an endless stream of camels, bullock waggons, *ekkas*, or one horse country carts, coolies with bundles in their hands, women with babies on their hips, perfectly naked children with enormous black stomachs, hard-featured men from the country carrying large bundles of sugar-cane, soft-featured men from the town with red *chadars*, or shawls, and bright brass *lotâhs*, or water-pots, men of rank riding with half a score of ragged attendants on foot, ladies of rank in scarlet-curtained palanquins, horses and donkeys laden with merchandise, droves of buffaloes, and flocks of sheep and goats following their shepherd, and occasionally, towering above all, a mighty elephant, swinging and swaying himself along through the noisy crowd.

Altogether, as Lieutenant Mainwaring lay upon his couch on the morning we are

speaking of, he considered that his present position was only less endurable than his prospects for the next few months, and he pitied himself accordingly. So much, indeed, did he pity himself at the precise moment when we find him, that he considered he had a perfect right to be in an exceedingly bad humour, and what is the same thing among Anglo-Indians, to vent the same upon the first native who came within his reach. Accordingly, when his bearer, who had observed, with true native watchfulness, that his master was beginning to feel the effects of the growing heat, came in with a low *salaam*, to suggest that permission or orders should be given to him to hang the punkahs, he was received with a storm of abuse ; and the idea was conveyed to him as accurately as the Lieutenant's Hindustáni would admit of, that his only object in making this suggestion was that he might sooner have an opportunity of stealing the

pay of the coolies who would have to be engaged to pull the punkahs, that his master knew what he was up to, and that he had better mind his own business. Finally, not perceiving a boot or other missile weapon within easy reach of his hand as he lay on his mat couch, Lieutenant Mainwaring bade him abruptly and somewhat forcibly to begone. The man bowed to the ground, drew aside the curtain which hung over the doorway, and disappeared. In a few moments more, however, after a warning cough outside the *pardah*, or portière, he again made his appearance.

“What the deuce do you want bothering here again,” said his master, breaking out into English in his indignation. “Be off, or I’ll ——” Whilst he was hesitating as to what particular verb of violence he would use in the future tense, the bearer informed him that an official messenger from the *Kachéri* or Court House had brought a letter for

his lordship, which he therewith tendered, and stood by waiting to see if there was any answer. "No ; give my compliments to the Assistant Commissioner, an answer will be sent afterwards." "Just like the confounded cheek of these fellows !" muttered Mainwaring. "D——d if I send him any answer at all." And he read the letter again, which ran as follows :

DISTRICT OF JELLALABAD.

Office of the Deputy-Commissioner and Collector of
Jellalabadpore.

No. A.O. $\frac{3472}{4}$.

March 3, 18—.

"SIR,

"I have the honour to inform you that a report has been presented to me in due form and by the proper authorities, that your grasscutters are in the habit of trespassing upon the lands of the Rakh Kálá-wálah, and of cutting and carrying away the grass, for the use of your horses, to the estimated value of Rupee 1, Anas, 2 only.

This Rakh being Government property, and under the immediate superintendence of the Deputy Commissioner of this district, I have to request that you will immediately warn your servants to desist for the future from committing any further acts of trespass, on pain of being dealt with according to the provisions of Act XIII. of 1842, and General Order No. 39, Book Circular III. of 1870.

“ I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

“ P. TOWSER,

“ *Assistant Commissioner.*

“ To Lieut. HAROLD MAINWARING, 26th Regt.

“ Commanding Detachment, Fort Jellalabad.”

“ *Bearer!* ” shouted he, savagely, as he finished the second perusal of this effusion. The servant appeared.

“ What the deuce is the meaning of all this ? ”

“ What should I know, Protector of the Poor ? ”

His master had told him nothing of the contents of the letter ; but a native servant is supposed to know everything !

“ Then why don’t you know. Where do my *grascuts* get grass ? ”

“ I have no news ; I will ask,” said the man.

“ Just send for them.”

Mr. Mainwaring would very much like to have thrashed the Assistant Commissioner ; but as he could not do that, clearly the next best thing to do was to thrash his *grascuts*. The men having been accordingly summoned and thrashed, they were asked if they had cut any grass on the Káláwálah Rakh. They replied—what was perfectly true—that they had not ; and further explained that a certain policeman, who had a spite against one of them, had told them that he would lodge a complaint against them at the Kachéri. He had not specified the form of the complaint to be made, but they had no doubt that this alleged trespass on the Govern-

ment *Rakh* or waste land, was the mode he had adopted of gratifying his *Zid*, or spite. Further question elicited the statement, that on the *grascuts* maintaining that their master was powerful enough to save them from the persecution of a mere policeman, that functionary had replied contemptuously, that he was a mere soldier, with no power whatever; whereas *his* master, the Assistant Commissioner, was powerful enough to do what he liked, not only with a lieutenant's *grascuts*, but with the lieutenant himself.

“I only wish I had the fellow here,” said Mainwaring, in a tone of voice which suggested that it was perhaps just as well, both for the policeman and for the officer, that he was not present at that particular moment. “Now look here,” said he to his *grascuts*, “you go and cut grass just wherever you please, and if that policeman interferes with you, just tell him from me that he is a —————. And look here, just tell me if

he interferes with you again. And look here, Bearer, just give these men a rupee between them."

All the three men salaamed to the ground, and, while Mainwaring returned to his couch, and elaborated a furious letter to the Assistant Commissioner under the soothing influence of a fresh cheroot, the Bearer retired to a shady place to discuss with the *grascuts* what proportion of the rupee with which he would debit his master's account as having been paid to them, he should keep for himself.

Now to understand this important case in all its bearings, the reader must know that Lieutenant Mainwaring, on his arrival at Jellalabadpore, had omitted to call on Mr. Towser. It is the custom in India for the last arrival to call on all those who may happen to be in the station ; but in the case of unmarried men, the rule is not always very strictly observed. The civil

station of Jellalabadpore was a very large one, and Mainwaring having a great many calls to pay, had never found the moment for leaving his card on the Assistant Commissioner, Mr. Towser, nor had he thought the omission of any great importance. Nor would it perhaps have been so, were Mr. Towser really nothing more than Assistant Commissioner; but unfortunately for Mr. Mainwaring, a few days after his arrival Mr. Towser's superior officer had gone three days' journey into the wilderness to judge certain *badmáshes*, or bad characters; and no one of equal rank in the service being available for that time, Mr. Towser had been appointed, and duly and formally gazetted, OFFICIATING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER in his room.

Now Mr. Towser's rank and importance in this exalted position demanded a formal call from all strangers whatsoever, and the remissness of the Lieutenant in

charge of the detachment at the Fort, during these “three glorious days,” had been duly noted and resented. Chancing to meet Mainwaring at a Badminton party some days after, Towser, now alas only an Assistant Commissioner again, had pointedly turned his back upon the young officer; and the fact that Mainwaring, who saw no meaning in the movement, neglected to take it as an affront, still further aggravated his offence; and so when in course of time they were both dining at the Great Superintendent of Works’, that official, seeing them mute in each other’s company, had said, loftily :

“Mr. Mainwaring, of course you know Mr. Towser, our Assistant Commissioner,” the latter had replied, with a stiff bow in the direction of the former, “No indeed; perhaps Mr. Mainwaring scarcely thought it worth his while to call on me when I was *only officiating* Deputy Commissioner.”

Mainwaring neither sank into the mud floor of the Grand Superintendent's drawing-room, nor did he blush crimson, and stammer out an apology, when he heard this fearful satire, but he very quietly expressed his sorrow that he had not had an earlier opportunity of making Mr. Towser's acquaintance, and regretted that he had not had time to call. In all of which the civilian hated *him* yet the more, and a marked coolness always characterized his official manner towards the young officer. But no direct offence had been given until the writing of the letter that Mainwaring had received with regard to the *grascuts*.

So, as the Lieutenant lay smoking and thinking, he elaborated a most offensive reply. He then thought that he would send no answer at all, and let the fellow remain merely d——d; but he finally got up and wrote a tolerably civil letter, referring to the alleged enmity of the policeman, and his

servants' assertion that they had never been on the Rakh at all. Harold sent the letter to the Kachéri in the course of the day—and forgot all about the subject.

Three or four days afterwards, he was roused from his morning slumbers about five o'clock by a confused noise in the *compound* or grounds surrounding his house, and learnt from his Bearer, who came in evidently very much alarmed, that three polisswallah, two conishtabels, and one sargent were bullying his stable-men, both *saises* and *grascuts*. Harold jumped up, made an exceedingly brief toilet, and went out to see what was the matter. There stood the three policemen, gorgeous and immense, and before them the two *grascuts* with their bundles at their feet, and near them the two *saises* with their wives, the gardener and his coolie, the table servant in his morning undress, and a score of people who had followed the policemen into

the compound, and stood gazing at a respectful distance waiting to see the issue of the dispute. When anything the least out of the common takes place in an Indian station,—if a cow gets loose, or a horse turns restive, or a man thrashes his dog or his sais,—a dozen people seem, as if by magic, to spring from the ground, to see or even to take part in what is going on.

The Lieutenant was very angry, and walking straight up to the police officer, he said, “What the —— do you mean by coming into my compound and kicking up all this row ?” and turning to the Bearer, he cried, “Turn all these fellows out at once ;” whereupon all the lookers-on turned and ran at a great pace about twenty yards back, and then, stopping and looking round, walked quietly and very gradually about fifteen yards forward.

“We are come to make a *táqiqát*, or inquiry regarding the grass that your

grascuts have stolen from the government Rakh."

"No, Sahib, all lies, all lies," broke out the accused servants; "we never were near the Rakh; it is all on account of you."

"Open that bundle of grass," said the head police officer. One of the constables did so, and scattered the grass all over the ground.

"What the —— do you mean, you rascal," said Harold, now really angry, "by littering the place all over with my horses' grass? If you don't clear out of the compound this moment, and quickly too, I'll kick you out."

"Wah wah," said all the assembled natives, and the *grascut* whose bundle had been opened, plucking up courage at the voice of this superior protector, began gathering up the grass and putting it together again under the very nose of the policeman. It was in vain that the sergeant

said that he had come to make an official inquiry with regard to the cutting of the grass; that the men had been seen lurking in the neighbourhood of the Rakh; that the grass in the bundle must be itself examined in order to see if it corresponded with the grass growing in the Rakh; that the men had refused his lawful summons, and even spoken disrespectfully of the civil authorities, alleging that their master was a military man, and that he cared neither for police nor Assistant Commissioners.

Harold refused to listen to the officials at all, and understood very little of the official Hindustáni which he heard; and the discomfited policemen accordingly retired.

For a day or two afterwards he debated within himself whether he ought to take any notice of this proceeding, especially as the policeman's manner had been decidedly offensive, but as he knew that any complaint he made, even to the Deputy Commissioner,

would probably be referred for disposal to his friend Mr. Towser, he determined to take no notice of the affair whatever. On the third day, however, as he was sitting reading the *Pioneer*, the Bearer came in and told him that a messenger from the Kachéri wanted to see him.

“What did he want?”

“He had a summons.”

“A summons!”

“Yes; and he says he must give it into the Sahib’s own hands.”

“What the deuce?—Well, show him in.”

The man came in with his long white coat and scarlet sash and brass badge of office, salaamed, delivered a printed paper into Harold’s hands, salaamed again, and retired.

The paper was a summons, requiring Harold, in due official language, to appear before the magistrate at the Kachéri, at 11 o’clock on the next day, to answer a charge

(preferred against him under Act XXXI. of 1862, Sections 11 to 13) of obstructing the police in the execution of their duty.

Harold did not at first know whether to be more indignant, or more surprised, or more amused ; but he put down the whole thing to the Indian *zid* between the policeman and his *grascut*, forgetting the more dangerous Anglo-Indian *zid* between the Assistant Commissioner and himself. But he made somewhat too light of the turn matters had taken, and attended at the Kachéri the next day at the hour appointed with a somewhat jaunty air.

The magistrate had not yet come, and there being no waiting-room for Englishmen, he had to sit on a broken-backed chair brought out by one of the Court messengers, amid a noisy and wondering crowd of expectant natives. At length a stir was made, a messenger flung up the reed screen with great importance, and Mr. Towser walked in.

Harold rose ; but it was beneath the official dignity to take any notice of an accused person, so the civilian passed on, sat down, and began hearing petitions and signing official papers as he heard them. This was too much for Harold, who advanced and said, “I have been summoned to appear here to-day at 11 o’clock on a most preposterous charge ; if you are to hear it, will you be good enough to dispose of it and let me go.”

“Yes, *I* shall try your case,” said the Competition-Wallah, with immense importance ; “but I cannot take it out of its turn. The rule of this Court is to make no difference between Europeans and Natives.”

Harold was powerless, and he felt it ; and he had to wait nearly two hours in the foul and heated atmosphere of the court-room, jostled by natives, who had eyes for nothing but the presiding magistrate, and looked at with evident satisfaction and triumph by

the three policemen, who soon made their appearance, and squatted down in a corner of the room—having previously called the attention of every *Babu* and *Chaprássi* about the Kachéri to the edifying spectacle of a sahib being kept there “eating shame,” until it should please their own all-powerful master, the Assistant Commissioner, to put him out of his misery. These good offices were, however, for the most part entirely superfluous, no one having a quicker or keener perception of the exact bearings of such a “situation,” or being more capable of enjoying, in his quiet undemonstrative way, the spectacle of a strange sahib being bullied by his own master, than an Indian clerk.

After about two hours of this purgatory, Towser’s *munshi*, or native clerk, called out in a needlessly loud tone of voice, *Wim-mering Sahib*—Harold’s name always puzzled the natives, and was usually transliterated and pronounced in that way—and a *chaprássi*

in the court echoed the call in a still louder tone, "Witnesses against Wimmering Sahib!" The three policemen came forward, so did Harold: and the case began. Harold was asked his name, and his father's name; his place of abode, and his age. The policemen gave their evidence, to the effect that they had been told that the accused's *grascuts* were in the habit of stealing grass from the government Rakh Kálawálah; that Constable *Pir Baksh* had accordingly warned the *grascuts*, but that they had only replied by using abusive language; that three days before a man called *Rám Lal*, (who was not present, having gone away to his sister's marriage), had told them that he had seen the *grascuts* cutting grass in the Rakh; that they had accordingly proceeded to the spot, and found the *grascuts* returning home with their bundles of grass on their heads; that they stopped them, and ordered them to open their bundles, and that they refused to do so,

but indulged in very foul language not only regarding themselves, but in contempt of the Civil Court, alleging that their master was a military man, and that he did not care a *pice* about either the police or the magistrate.

“ We followed them,” continued the witness, “ to the Fort, and were proceeding to make a formal *tāqiqāt*, when *Wimmering Sahib* rushed out upon us, threatened to strike us, obstructed the *tāqiqāt*, and drove us, in spite of all our remonstrances, out of the compound, in the presence of a vast concourse of people.” A man was then called as a witness to prove that the *grascuts* were men of bad character, that he had heard that one of them had once been in trouble with regard to the stealing of a *lotāh*, though he did not know whether he had been convicted or not.

This was the case for the prosecution. Harold was then called upon for his defence. He could only say that he had no idea the

police had any right to make *tāqiqāt* in his compound ; that he did not even know the meaning of the word *tāqiqāt* ; that he would be the last man in the world wilfully to obstruct the police in the execution of their duty ; and that, finally, he did not quite see what the bad character of his *grascuts*, even if it was more clearly proved, had to do with the case against him.

“ The Court is the proper judge of all the evidence before it,” said the magistrate, sternly, and Mr. Towser then proceeded, according to Indian custom, to cross-examine the accused at great length, after which he pronounced him guilty of the offence with which he was charged, and ordered him to pay a fine of a hundred rupees.

Harold was too angry to trust himself to speak, so he made a bow, turned on his heel, and strode out of the room.

On his arrival at the Fort, an English letter was put into his hand. It was from

Sybil, announcing her approaching marriage.
“ Well, that’s one good thing at all events. Nephew and heir to a country baronet. Poor little Sybil ! I’m so glad. I hope the fellow will have some good shooting. Anyhow I must try and exchange, and get out of this infernal country. By Jove ! I could have killed that young skunk to-day over and over again, and he knew it, I’m sure. I should like to—— poh ! Bearer ! ”

“ Sahib ! ”

“ A brandy and soda.”

“ It is brought, Sahib.”

And in a minute more, Harold had relieved his feelings in a long draught of that cool, sparkling, refreshing beverage, which can never be thoroughly appreciated but in India.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FEW days after the events detailed in the last chapter, Harold Mainwaring, who felt that although he had been bullied and insulted by the Assistant Commissioner, he need not cut himself off from the society of his friends in Jellalabadpore, ordered his *tum-tum* at a quarter before twelve o'clock, with the intention of paying a few visits in the civil lines.

It is hard to say how long it is since some punster—possibly some Oxford Jehu, who knew more about horseflesh than about Latin—gave the name of a *tandem* to two horses driven “at length ;” but we suppose that

when advertising coach-builders and two-wheeled carriages were far less common than they are now, the name of tandem cart may have been applied to that very varied class of vehicles which are known as dog-carts, tax-carts, Albert-carts, or otherwise. Anyhow, the Anglo-Indians of the last century must have so called them, and their native servants assimilated the word into the current colloquial language as a *tum-tum*, a mysterious word which is now familiarly used by every native and every Englishman in India.

At a quarter before twelve to the moment, accordingly, Harold's *tum-tum* came to the door. Indian servants, who have neither watches nor clocks, are the most punctual in the world. The sun was in the meridian, fiery and blazing ; there was no work possible in the fields, and all the labourers had been lying down under shelter for the last hour ; the very dogs were beginning to pant

in the shade ; even the road from the Fort to the civil lines was at its very emptiest ; but Fashion prescribed the time for Harold to pay his visits in the station. It is true his tum-tum had a large white canvas awning stretched upon a light iron frame—young lieutenants cannot afford broughams for visiting, as well as tum-tums for driving in the evening or going out to dinner—but the dry hot air seemed to shrivel up his very throat as he breathed it in, and great beads of perspiration stood out upon the groom's face as he stood quietly flapping away the flies with a white cloth from the head of the panting horse.

It is the fashion to consider Mrs. Grundy a tolerably severe task-mistress in England, but she is nothing to her Viceroy or Vice-Reine in India. And she imperatively prescribes the two hottest hours in the twenty-four, and the two hours when every man in India is busiest at his own work, namely, from noon

until two p.m., as the only time of day during which a visit of ceremony—a visit which in fact counts as a visit at all—may be paid by one person to another throughout the length and breadth of Anglo-India. Those who can form any idea of what India is like out of doors at mid-day in the “hot weather,” and who will further bear in mind that everyone in India has some regular work to do—or he would not be there—will be able to appreciate fully the manifold advantages and general convenience of this rule.

But Society, which is the most patient slave in the world, and which, in England, contents itself with lacing itself up in tight corsets, balancing itself on high heels, or encumbering itself with long trains, is further ready in Anglo-India to sally out at mid-day, under a tropical sun, to pay its court to its remorseless Deity.

This digression *à propos* of tum-tums and

times of Indian visiting, is perhaps too much after the manner of by-gone novelists to please modern tastes ; so let us hasten on, out of the dust and glare of the Indian roads, into a dark cool drawing-room, where Mrs. Langham is sitting on a comfortable Gujerát chair, talking about Mr. Langham's chances of "leave to England" with Harold, who, like ourselves, has just entered her presence-chamber.

Mrs. Langham was debating in her mind as to whether she should say anything to Harold about his adventure at the Kachéri, which had been already magnified into almost heroic proportions ; and Harold, who instinctively felt from her manner, at once *distracte* and expectant, that something was coming, made a bold plunge into the furthest region from Jellalabadpore which he thought would have any chance of holding Mrs. Langham, and told her as much as he knew about his sister's marriage with

Mr. Humphrey Perceval, of the Coldstream Guards, heir, &c., &c.

“And so your sister will be Lady Perceval some day,” said Mrs. Langham, with a mingled air of jealousy, patronage, and interest, which amused Harold a good deal, and which would have amused him still more had he not been momentarily afraid of the appearance on the *tapis* of the “police case,” which, for some reason or other, he dreaded even more than at the commencement of the visit. Under cover of Mrs. Langham’s surprise at his English news, however, he contrived to beat a timely retreat, and resumed, not without fresh trepidation, his round of calls. Fortunately for his peace of mind he found no one else at home; they were all, like himself, making “dreary rounds;” and he returned to the Fort to recruit, after his social campaign, by divesting himself of all his superfluous garments, and, after an abundant *tiffin*,

passing the remainder of the day in a recumbent position on his couch under the punkah, with the assistance of sundry cheroots, and a certain, or rather an uncertain, number of what Anglo-Indians call Pegs. The true etymology of "peg" being by no means as easy to arrive at as that of *tum-tum*, and the accepted derivation being of a mournful, not to say a mortuary character, suffice it to say that the meaning of the word in the mouth or throat of an Anglo-Indian is merely that of a large glass of brandy and soda-water.

Mrs. Langham had a large dinner-party that night, and she would certainly have asked Harold on the strength of his new connection, had not, in the first place, her table been full, and, in the second place, the redoubtable Mr. Towser been numbered among the invited guests. The hostess was a pale, unenergetic woman, as colourless in mind as she was in face, with few ideas beyond the

leave and promotion of her husband who was the Commissioner of Jellalabadpore, a man of almost awful importance, and who exacted almost as much deference from his wife as from the numerous smaller officials, both English and native, whose more or less rapid advancement depended upon his good-will.

A little before sunset, he arrived from his office, and he and Mrs. Langham got into a large canoe barouche, with a coachman and two attendant grooms looking smart in their white coats and scarlet turbans, and drove slowly up and down the principal road in the station.

A dozen water-carriers with their water-skins were busy laying the dust and cooling the air after the fierce heat of the day, and salaaming to the ground under their burdens as the Commissioner Sahib rolled by.

Soon this “cool road,” as it is called in that picturesque eastern language which gives to the poor water-carrier who makes it

so, the name of Heavenly, was crowded with carriages of every kind and description, from the imposing barouche of the Commissioner to the most rattletrap tum-tum of the poorest Eurasian clerk, anxious to take his place, if only out of doors, among those whose houses he is for ever forbidden to enter.

After the usual number of greetings, the canoe barouche rolled back in the dusk to the Commissioner's house, and the great man, having duly bathed his august person, put himself in the hands of his bearer, and was dressed for dinner.

He was a large pompous man with a deep voice, and a supercilious manner, tawny hair, a dull complexion, and an illegible handwriting. After all, why not say so? A man's handwriting is as much a part of his personality as his nose, and his character can be known just as truly from the one as from the other.

There was a large dinner-party at the Commissioner's that night, and, as we have already said, our old friend Mr. Towser was one of the invited guests.

There is necessarily but little variety in Indian dinner-parties. A few of the station officials and their wives, who had also been bidden, tired to death of meeting each other day after day, felt languidly pleased at the presence of two comparative strangers, Captain Nicol and his new wife, just arrived from home, and on their way to "join" at Gurdásnaggar.

Captain Nicol was what was called a "military civilian," an Indian anomaly sufficiently familiar to all those who have been, like the Honourable Emily Eden, "up the country."

A military civilian is a military officer in civil employ, who rises *pari passu* in each department, and who, starting as a Lieutenant and an Assistant Commissioner, may

some day be a Lieutenant-General and a Commissioner and Superintendant.

By a convenient and useful theory, military men are considered especially valuable as local judges in *non-regulation* or out-of-the-way provinces ; but the military-civilians somewhat resemble the amphibious animal which, according to the celebrated definition, “ can’t live on the land, and dies in the water,” inasmuch as by the time they have attained any standing in the service, they have entirely lost their military experience, while they can never be expected to have learned anything of law. But they are appointed by the Indian Government without the interference of the Civil Service Commissioners—with their Competitive Examinations and such like ; they draw thrice or four times the salary as civilians that they would do as mere military officers ; they wear a scarlet tunic instead of the usual black dress-coat and white tie (at

2 P.M. !) at the gubernatorial levées ; their names can be added to the strength of the army, if the army is wanted to look big, or subtracted from it if it is wanted to look small ; and they are personally very often exceedingly good fellows ; in fine, everything is for the best in the best possible of Administrations.

The military civilian indeed, like the *roux* in the French proverb, is inclined to be either *tout bon* or *tout mauvais*.

The military martinet grafted on to the conceited civilian does not produce the sweetest of apples ; but the early training of the mess-room, and that best of all schools, a good regiment, fits many a man to withstand the manifold temptations which threaten to warp, if not to destroy, the character of the youth who suddenly finds himself in the position of having almost arbitrary power over all those with whom he is brought in contact. Captain Nicol was a

capital specimen of the class ; and two years' leave in England, to say nothing of the presence of a young and charming wife, gave a freshness to his whole being which was eminently un-Indian.

Then there was Captain Philpotts, a Royal Engineer in the Irrigation Department, an officer who had the honour of being a thorn in the side of so great a man as the Commissioner himself. That a military man should be a civilian was bad enough. It was unfortunate, but it was endurable. After all he was a civilian. He was actually within the sacred fold, even though he had not originally entered at the door, but had been hoisted over the wall. "*J'y suis, j'y reste*" might be his motto. But an irrigation officer was not a civilian at all, and yet he had, or wished to have, some authority in the country. A mere English sapper—a rank outsider, a hireling in fact—who presumed to employ, and thus to order

about those sheep which belonged as it were of right to the civil officer of the district. A disciple too of Sir Arthur Cotton, that canal incendiary, that agrarian firebrand, that visionary, that blind guide, that shallow prophet, who maintained that all was *not* for the best in the best possible of administrations!

Mr. Langham, however, received Captain Philpotts as he would have done a distinguished stranger, and Captain Philpotts, who was just going home, was delighted to meet Captain Nicol, who had just come out, and the Commissioner's wine was far too good to be mixed with water even in conversation.

“When are you thinking of going home?” said Mrs. Parker to Mrs. Clark across the table.

Now Mrs. Parker had just learned that Mr. Clark, who had applied for leave, had been refused that very day: so when her friend the wife of the disappointed appli-

cant said, as carelessly as she could, "Oh, we have not quite made up our minds," Mrs. Parker returned gallantly to the charge with an "Oh! I thought it was quite settled. I wouldn't put it off too long if I were you, people *may* stay too long, and Dr. Bradshaw told me that Mr. Clark was not at all the thing—not at all the thing," said she, repeating the professional estimate which she had so aptly fastened upon Dr. Bradshaw.

"By the way, are you going up to the hills this hot weather?" said a neighbour opportunely to Mrs. Parker, whereby Mrs. Clark was relieved, and the conversation turned.

Still it flowed, however, hither and thither in the old and well-worn channels of leave, officiating appointments, changes of station, going home, promotion, and such kindred topics as never fail to interest Anglo-Indian Society.

After dinner, the ladies criticised Mrs.

Nicol's dress, in virtue of her being a stranger, a bride, and a new arrival. Mrs. Parker, however, proved herself the lion of the evening, for having with great self-restraint reserved herself until the gentlemen had left the dining-room, and a complete and silent audience was assembled, she entertained the company with a graphic and spicy account of Harold Mainwaring's brutal assault upon the police, his trial before the judicial Towser, and his conviction, sentence, and general discomfiture. This brought up Mr. Towser, who, assenting with civil leer to the main statements of the narrative, took the liberty of making a few modest corrections, which, strange to say, were not entirely to his own disadvantage.

Mrs. Langham showed her greatness and superiority to those who had only *heard*, by casually remarking that she had *seen* Mr. Mainwaring that very day, and that his sister was going to make a great match at

home. This nettled Mrs. Parker, who rejoined that she was sure no one at Jellalabadpore cared twopence about Mr. Mainwaring—still less about his sister.

Mrs. Langham, with a view of finally crushing her antagonist, continued: “Perhaps not, but Miss Mainwaring is going to marry a man of title, Sir Humphrey Perceval !”

“Really !” said the other, interested in spite of herself. “K.C.S.I. ?”

“No,” said Mrs. Langham with concentration, “a *Baronet* !”

But hereupon there came to the relief of Mrs. Parker, to the utter astonishment of Mrs. Langham, no less a person than Mr. Towser, who said,—

“Ah, yes, the Percevals and my people used to be great friends at home. Old Sir Humphrey Perceval was my godfather !”

Whereupon Mrs. Langham, who knew something of English society, and had her

own views upon what Mr. Towser might be “at home,” held her tongue wonderingly for a minute, and then turned to Mrs. Nicol and asked her in a kind tone a question which was by no means new to her, and which she already felt increasing difficulty in answering.

“How do you like India?”

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER the ceremony at St. George's, Hanover Square, Humphrey went back to luncheon at Queen Street, Mayfair, with his *wife*, and thence to Charing Cross Station and so to Dover and Calais and Amiens and Paris. Sybil had never been out of England before, and enjoyed every novelty in a way that at once amused and delighted her husband ; while she herself thought that travelling was certainly the most delightful way of spending one's time that could be imagined. And then she was with Humphrey—her own Humphrey, and there was so much to be learnt and so

much to be forgotten ; and it was only the painful that she had to forget, and only the pleasant that she had to learn.

So her days passed, each fairer and brighter than that which preceded it, as it removed her twenty-four hours farther from Mrs. Osborne and Mrs. Pevensey, and advanced her twenty-four hours further in Humphrey's life and Humphrey's love.

One of the pleasantest things she had to learn was her husband ; and she found the study at least as interesting as the caps and earrings of the Boulogne fisherwomen, the Cathedral at Amiens, or even the galleries of the Louvre. She had seen so little of him before her marriage, that she had all the more to learn and all the more to tell him, now that they were man and wife, and went their way a pair of married lovers, feeding on those most delicious of all this world's sweets, the sweets of pure but passionate

wedded love, of pleasure untainted with shame, and ennobled by mutual respect. But who can thus wander through the flowery meadows untainted with a weed, and hand in hand enjoy at once all the pleasures of possession and of anticipation—with a dazzling Present leading on to a bright calm Future? Who but those who like Humphrey and Sybil have joined their hands and their hearts ere either of them have drunk too deeply of the world's poisoned chalice, and before they have been soured by disappointment, or satiated with artificial pleasures; before the noble “illusions” we are born with have been replaced by the conventional experience which we acquire; or the fresh faith and the great hope of their generous young minds have been blighted by that “knowledge of the world” which but too often comes from acquaintance with some of its darker paths. Youth is the season for Love, and Love is the signal for Marriage. They have been joined

together by God ; cursed be that man who puts them asunder.

And as Humphrey and Sybil became daily better acquainted with each other, and learned to respect and to admire as well as to love, they each became insensibly interested with the thoughts and feelings and opinions of the other—this mutual insensible influence raising each of them above their former selves, and laying a sure foundation in mutual confidence, as well as mutual love, for a happy and complete wedded life.

They stayed for some time in Paris, and enjoyed that brilliant capital, as much as it is possible for any one to do who does not mingle in its home society.

They lived like tourists, at an hotel, and though they had the good sense never to weary themselves with mere sight-seeing, the dullest and least profitable of all the conventional modes of killing time, they saw much

of the exterior of the town, the galleries of painting and sculpture, the churches and museums, and all those public buildings both in Paris and the environs which formed one of the glories of the gay capital before the days of the Prussian and the *Commune*. Of social Paris, of course they saw nothing. But as far as society was concerned they were complete in themselves, as each was to the other the most agreeable person in the world. From Paris they went to Dijon and Lyons, and on to Marseilles and by the Riviera to Genoa and Florence. An extension of leave enabled Humphrey to continue his journey to Rome and Naples, and to linger for a few days on the shores of those Italian lakes so enchanting and yet so little frequented in the early spring, ere the lovers plunged through the snow of an alpine pass and were rattled once more by rail back to Paris, and so at length to Sybil's new home in Queen Street, Mayfair.

Was there ever such a happy young couple on the face of the earth since our first parents loved in Paradise ? And if anything could seem brighter for Humphrey and Sybil than the present, was it not the future ? Ay ; but let them enjoy the present. *Che sarà sarà.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

“WHAT!” says a fair reader, “married already! a marriage at the end of the first volume. Perhaps they are not the hero and heroine?”

“Indeed, madam, they are.”

“Oh! but how dull. I made sure that Sybil would have been poisoned by Mrs. Pevensey, or that when she arrived at the church door a note from Humphrey would have been handed to her by his soldier-servant in a tall bearskin, to say that he had just started for Italy with an opera-dancer, or somebody else’s bride—or that *something* should have broken off the match, or at least postponed it, until, after two volumes

more of misery and misunderstandings, of cross parents and cross purposes, the hero and heroine should happily patch up their broken hearts and unite their wandering hands at the conclusion of the third volume. But a marriage so hasty is positively indecent ; and such a marriage ! What was the use of making the hero a Guardsman, and giving him such good looks and such good expectations—if he was to marry a governess. A man who might have aspired to Lady Millionnaire Blueblood or Miss Amabel Lovely, and who, after breaking the hearts of half-a-dozen married women, might have married a beautiful and high-born heiress —to cut short at once his own prospects and my not very great interest in the present story, for the sake of a penniless girl, with neither position nor connections, and of whom we know very little, and Humphrey nothing whatever ! It is doubtful whether she ought even to be recognized at all.” .

“ I am very sorry for her, madam ; I know the value of your good opinion, but, believe me, the old clerk was right, and Humphrey —except in so far as he may have incurred your displeasure, is not to be pitied at all.”

“ Well, but why marry them so soon ? Is not marriage the end and aim of every right-thinking woman’s life ? and ought not a novel—which is but the story of one woman’s life written for the amusement of other women,—to end in marriage ? ”

“ Not unless, madam, the real life should also end there,—not unless the English bride, by a fate more cruel than that of the Indian *Suttee*, should sacrifice her life on the hy-
meneal altar. It is not marriage merely that is the aim of every girl, but a happy mar-
riage ; and it is into the happiness of the married life of the hero and heroine that the novelist usually takes so little trouble to inquire. The old formula suffices, they married ‘ and lived happily ever after.’ We

have done with them. Drop the curtain : dismiss the actors, they have played their parts. Let us go ‘to-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new.’”

But what is a happy marriage ? A marriage with plenty of bridesmaids and a good-looking best man, with plenty of cake and wine, and satin slippers and rice, with handsome presents and liberal settlements, and a beautiful bride and a brave bridegroom. These are all charming things in their way. And yet, when the blue-jacketed postilions crack their whips and the four greys whirl the yellow chariot under triumphal arches of flowers, as the bride and bridegroom take their departure for “Howard Court, the seat of His Grace the Duke of Fitz Alan, where the newly married couple are to pass the honeymoon,” are we sure that their life will be happy, and that their connubial chariot will always run smoothly along the road of life under arches

on which Health and Happiness is inscribed in flowers? I trow not.

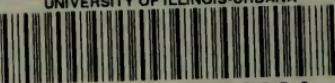
And is the married state so much less interesting than the life of boys and girls? And if not, fair and gentle readers, are you content to follow Sybil through two more volumes? No?—then you have but to return them unopened to Mr. Mudie, and beg that he will not send you such dull novels in the future. But if you will; why then I will do my best to tell you as little that is dull and as much that is interesting about them as possible, and we will commence as soon as you please.

“Very good. Ethel, darling, will you go down to the Morning Room and bring me up the second volume of ‘*Beating the Air.*’”

END OF VOL. I.

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